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“PRISCILLA AND AQUILA INSTRUCTED
APOLLOS MORE PERFECTLY IN THE
WAY OF THE LORD” (ACTS 18)

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Tertius . . .

Near the end of Paul's letter to the Christians of Rome, we gain a rare glimpse of a behind-the-scenes participant in Paul's letter-writing ministry. Romans 16:22 says, "I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord" (NRSV). Tertius was Paul's amanuensis, the person who penned the letter which Paul spoke aloud. His job was to prepare Paul's words to be read and heard.

Tertius uncharacteristically and momentarily stepped from behind the curtain because he knew some of the letter's recipients and wanted to add his voice to Paul's greetings. Similarly, I will momentarily step from behind the editor's desk and introduce myself. My name is Jeff Miller. Since 1999 I have taught Bible and ministry at Milligan College, a Christian liberal arts college in eastern Tennessee. I also serve as a part-time worship minister. My wife Dana is a businesswoman and was before that a children's minister. We have two daughters and one infant granddaughter. Like many readers of *Priscilla Papers*, I grew up complementarian by default. My mind and heart changed through a series of influences that I cannot fully trace. I became familiar with CBE through *Priscilla Papers*, and one of its advertisements prompted me to attend CBE's 2007 conference in Bangalore, India—a life-changing experience. I have presented papers at CBE conferences, published articles in *Priscilla Papers* (under the name J. David Miller—sorry for the confusion) and in *Mutuality*. I am a member of CBE's blog team. In my new role as editor of *Priscilla Papers*, I feel an affinity with

Tertius. I appreciate his willingness to work behind the scenes, proclaiming the words of others rather than his own. I appreciate his dedication and skill. I appreciate his desire to connect with Christian brothers and sisters who would encounter his work. And I appreciate that he saw his work as Christian service, for his greeting was specifically "in the Lord."

I also deeply appreciate the skilled service of those who have gone before me in the ministry of *Priscilla Papers*, including Betty Elliot, Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, Carol Thiessen, and Victoria Petersen Hillique. Likewise, *Priscilla Papers* is indebted to William Spencer, who—together with faithful coworkers such as Aída Besançon Spencer and Deb Beatty Mel—has given *Priscilla Papers* strong shoulders for subsequent leaders to stand on. Please notice in the masthead below that Bill has agreed to continue to serve as consulting editor.

I also appreciate the authors—four women and four men—whose work fills the following pages with insights about Old Testament women, including Eve, Ruth, Jephthah's daughter, Tamar, and others. And what more should I say? For space would fail me to include articles about Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah, Dinah, Tamar, Asenath, Jochebed, Miriam, Zipporah, Rahab, Deborah, Naomi, Hannah, Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, Basemath, Taphath, Huldah, Esther . . . of whom the world was not worthy.

And finally, I must certainly express appreciation to my partner in this behind-the-scenes work, Theresa Garbe, the new associate editor and graphic designer for *Priscilla Papers*.

. . . greet you in the Lord.

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The Genesis of Equality, Part 1

KEVIN GILES

The painful and seemingly unending division among evangelicals over the relationship of the sexes is bedeviled by disputes about the interpretation of key biblical texts, most notably 1 Tim 2:9–15.¹ However, how this Pauline text is understood depends more than anything else on how Gen 1–3 is understood. For complementarians² what makes Paul’s prohibition on women teaching and exercising authority in church universally and transculturally binding is the premise that in creation, before the Fall, God gave the man authority over the woman. The importance for complementarians of the belief that woman was subordinated to man before the Fall cannot be overestimated. In stressing the vital nature of this argument for complementarians, Daniel Doriani notes that “nineteen of the twenty two authors” in the definitive collection of essays, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, argue for the subordination of women “on the basis of creation, or the order or creation. . . .”³

Egalitarian evangelicals entirely agree with complementarians that no text in all of scripture is more important than Gen 1–3 in working out the God-given ideal for the man-woman relationship. The two groups simply disagree on how these chapters are to be interpreted.

Genesis 1

Gen 1 is rightly seen as a prologue to the whole Bible. It is put first because what it teaches is of first importance.⁴ It tells us that everything is created by God, that what God creates is good and that the apex of God’s creative work is humankind, man and woman standing side by side—one species, two sexes. In Gen 1:27 we read,

So God created humankind (*’adam*⁵),
in the image of God he created *them*;
male and female he created them.

The pre-eminence of humankind is suggested by them being created last as the apex of God’s creative work, by the fact that only man and woman are said to be made in “the image and likeness of God” (1:26), and because God gives to them dominion over the earth and all living creatures (1:28).

Exactly what is meant by saying that man and woman are made in “the image (*tselem*) and likeness (*demuth*) of God” has aroused much debate. It is an especially bold assertion

Thus what we have in this primary and definitive scriptural comment on the sexes is the strongest imaginable affirmation of the equal status of man and woman (“in the image of God he created them”), of male-female differentiation (“male and female he created them”) and of their conjoint authority over creation (“let them have dominion”).

in light of OT prohibition on making images. Images were proscribed because to make an image of God identified the Creator with creation (Exod 20:1–4). The most widely supported view is that to say man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God indicates that they have been given dominion or lordship over the world. Together they have been created to exercise God’s rule as his vice-regents. This interpretation is suggested not only by ancient Middle

Eastern parallels where an image of the king represents his dominion, but also because immediately after stating that man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God, God gives them dominion (*radah*) over all living creatures (1:26), commanding them to rule (*kabash*) over all the earth (1:28). Note that rather than being differentiated in authority, Gen 1 gives to man and woman the same authority. One does not rule over the other. They rule conjointly. One leading complementarian comes to the same conclusion: By placing his image on the man and the woman and by setting them in a

particular environment, therefore, God assigns to them the mandate of *representative rule*. This rule is the *joint function* of the man and the woman.⁶

In addition to the command to subdue and rule the earth, man and woman are together commanded to “be fruitful and multiply.” No mention is made of any separation of roles in being “fruitful.” Ruling and procreating are roles or functions given to men and women alike in God’s good creation.

Thus what we have in this primary and definitive scriptural comment on the sexes is the strongest imaginable affirmation of the equal status of man and woman (“in the image of God he created them”), of male-female differentiation (“male and female he created them”) and of their conjoint authority over creation (“let them have dominion”). Their equality cannot be taken simply to be a spiritual equality, an “equality before God.” The man and the woman are depicted as standing side by side, head erect in the world God has created, and it is over this world they are conjointly to rule. Indeed, Gen 1:27–28 speaks of the equality of man and woman in *being* and in *function*.

Another well-known complementarian writes, “male-female equality does not constitute undifferentiated sameness. There is a profound and beautiful distinction” between the sexes.⁷ All evangelical egalitarians would completely agree.

Male and female equality and differentiation are both creation givens. It thus follows that both equality and differentiation are to be honored, maintained and seen as God's good gifts.

Likewise, egalitarians would agree with complementarians that although the term "complementary" is not found in the text of Gen 1 the idea is unmistakably present. Man and woman *complete* what it means to be human. The writer of course assumes that every reader knows that man or woman alone cannot procreate. Each needs the other to fulfil or "complete" this divine mandate. Their complementarity, however, is more than biological. The fact that the two sexes are made joint rulers over God's world may imply each makes a distinctive contribution to this task; they complement each other in serving God. What together they bring to this task is more than the sum of the parts; it is synergistic.

On the interpretation of Gen 1, evangelical egalitarians and complementarians are basically in agreement. The opening chapter of the Bible speaks of the equality of the sexes, their differentiation as man and woman and their complementarity. We are agreed that there is nothing in this chapter that speaks of the subordination of women. On the interpretation of chs. 2 and 3, however, evangelical egalitarians and complementarians come to opposing conclusions.

Hermeneutical guidelines for Genesis 2 and 3

Gen 2:4–24 gives a different account of creation than Gen 1. How this second creation story is to be rightly understood is hotly disputed. Walter Brueggemann says,

No text in Genesis (or likely in the whole Bible) has been more used, interpreted and misunderstood than this text. It has received from the dogmatic tradition such an overlay of messages that the first and perhaps most important task of interpretation is to distinguish between the statement of the text and the superstructure laid upon it.⁸

With this warning ringing in our ears, we must ask, how can this text be approached to hear what the text is actually saying? I suggest the following hermeneutical guidelines.

1. Gen 2 and 3 are to be understood as complementing ch. 1. Thus no interpretation of anything in chs. 2–3 should be taken to contradict or correct anything clearly taught in ch. 1. To put it positively, ch. 1 should be taken as the best guide to how chs. 2–3 are interpreted.

2. The text of Gen 2 and 3 and the traditional interpretation of details in these chapters are not to be equated. All evangelicals can agree on the authority of the text itself. What is disputed in this chapter is the interpretation of the text. To hear the text rightly we must strive not to go beyond what the text says.

Why Paul alluded to these details in the second creation story and what they are supposed to imply in his interchange with the Christians in Ephesus is not a question the exegete can discover simply by studying Gen 2 and 3.

3. NT quotations or allusions to Gen 1–3 do not prescribe the interpretation of these chapters⁹ any more than what Paul says on the image of God, for example, prescribes how the image of God should be understood in Gen 1:26–27.¹⁰ The Genesis text, and other OT texts quoted in the NT, must be interpreted in terms of what they actually say and how they would have been understood by the authors and the original readers in their own historical setting. Notwithstanding, here is no reason to dispute

any reference Paul makes in these chapters from Genesis. For example, the Apostle says in his first epistle to Timothy, "Adam was formed first then Eve" (2:13), and then adds, "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (2:14). In these words Paul reflects what is said in Genesis.¹¹ Why Paul alluded to these details in the second creation story and *what* they are supposed to imply in his interchange with the Christians in Ephesus is not a question the exegete can discover simply by studying Gen 2 and 3. Their force and application

are to be discovered by a close study of 1 Timothy. It would seem that Paul appeals to these details in the creation story to rebuke the women in Ephesus who were putting themselves first when they had been "deceived" by the false teachers Timothy had been sent to oppose.¹² 1 Cor 11:8 also raises no difficulties. Gen 2 does have woman being made "from" man and "for" man, as Paul notes. However, on mentioning this fact Paul then adds, "Nevertheless (*plēn*)¹³ in the LORD [that is, in the new creation] woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman" (11:11–12).

4. And lastly, in seeking to hear what Gen 2 and 3 actually say, the term "role" must be absolutely excluded. In sociology this term refers to characteristic behavior that can change. If this is how the word is being used by complementarians, as a novice to this debate might assume, then it suggests that human beings are called simply to play the role of being a man or woman, that sexual identity is not God-given. The novice would not know that complementarians in fact use the word "role" in a way endorsed by no dictionary to speak of permanent power relations. These "roles" are allocated by birth as a man or a woman. Why, we might ask, speak of "differing roles" when referring to differing authority? The term "role" should not be used in interpreting Gen 1–3 for at least three reasons. First, because both creation stories are given to make the point that God has made us men and women; sexual differentiation is not a role open to change.¹⁴ Second, because the way complementarians use this word obscures what is really being said. Instead of saying plainly that God has subordinated women to men we are told God has given differing roles to men and women. And third, because

using a word that has specialized meaning in the theatre and in sociology, but no specific meaning in biblical scholarship, is bound to corrupt the work of exegesis. I agree with the complementarian OT scholar who has said, “in the cause of truth we should give up talking about the roles of the sexes.”¹⁵

What Genesis 2 and 3 actually say and teach

In Gen 1, God’s creative work takes place in orderly succession, culminating with the creation of man and woman. In contrast, Gen 2–3 is a narrative, a story unfolding in seven scenes. In Gen 1 we find the repeated refrain that everything God made was “good” (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). What God created was perfect and complete—“very good” (1:31). The narrative of chs. 2–3, rather than emphasizing perfection, begins by allowing that God has to perfect his creation which was at first incomplete. Consider Gen 2:5, “Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground...” (NIV). The unfolding narrative tells how God step by step put all this right. God creates the solitary Adam to till the ground and plants a garden, giving to it vegetation, trees and rivers. But something is still missing; the narrator has God himself tell the reader what this is. “It is not good that Adam should be alone” (2:18). To meet this deficiency God first creates the animals which Adam names. However, none of the animals prove suitable as a partner for him.

“Partner” is a good translation of the Hebrew *‘ezer kenegdo*. The first word of this phrase is commonly translated “helper.” A helper can be a superior, an equal or a subordinate. Many instances of *‘ezer* in the Bible refer to God as helper, a superior coming to the aid of a subordinate. In Gen 2:18–20, the qualifying word *kenegdo* makes clear what the author intended. Adam needs a helper who is his equal and complementary counterpart. One complementarian scholar agrees, noting Adam’s need for a helper “matching him.”¹⁶ The narrator is thus implying that God is the helper superior to Adam; the animals are helpers inferior to Adam; woman is the helper equal with Adam.

To meet Adam’s need for a true partner, God takes the initiative by creating the woman. The making of the woman by God from Adam’s rib, more precisely from his “side” (*tsela*), affirms that the woman, like Adam, is directly created by God. On seeing the woman, Adam jubilantly exclaims in Hebrew poetic form, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman (*’ishah*), for she was taken out of man (*’ish*)” (2:23). The words “flesh of my flesh” reflect biblical ideas of kinship, shared status. Adam recognizes another human being like himself, a person made of the “same stuff” as he is. He does not name her, but jubilantly exclaims that she is *’ishah*/woman having been taken from *’ish* /man and thus his counterpart. These are the customary words in Hebrew to differentiate man and woman; neither term is a personal name. Adam names the woman

“Eve” after the Fall (Gen 3:20). What Adam says on seeing the woman implies the substantial equality of the sexes and their God-given differentiation as man and woman, not the subordination of the woman.

In a similar word play in Gen 2:7, Adam/*’adam* is said to be made from the earth/*’adamah*, and in this case the one who comes from the earth is to rule over the earth. Derivation does not imply subordination. As a postscript the narrator adds a comment about marriage: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh” (2:24). The notion of complementarity cannot be missed. From the two, something new is created, a partnership, a complementary union in which the man adds to the woman’s life and the woman adds to the man’s life, and procreation is made possible.

Only at this point in the story is *’adam* man in distinction to woman, and only at this point do man and woman stand side by side in reciprocal and complementary relationship. There is no hint here of any hierarchical ordering of the sexes. How their co-equal relationship was lost is next explained.

In Gen 3 we discover that in the Garden is a force opposed to God, yet created by God, and that sin and punishment are possibilities.¹⁷ The narrator begins this scene by introducing someone new to the drama, “the serpent [who is] more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God has made” (3:1). It speaks to the woman, first getting her to doubt what God had commanded, “You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” and then to disbelieve what God had said, “For the day that you eat of it you shall die” (2:17). She succumbs to the temptation and eats of the fruit of the tree and “gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate” (3:6). Together and in partnership they disobey God’s command.

Immediately following their mutual disobedience and sin they hear “the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden” (3:8). Both of them hide. Both know they have disobeyed the creator of the Garden. When God asks Adam why he has eaten of the tree (3:11), Adam blames “the woman whom you gave to be with me.” When God addresses Eve she says, “the serpent tricked me.” Confronted with their sin, both the man and the woman try to pass the blame to someone else, but God does not accept this. He holds them both personally responsible. No excuse can minimize their solemn, personal and direct answerability to God which is the burden of both man and woman. They are not only equal as fellow human beings but also equal in responsibility for their sin.

God’s word of reproach is given to the three principal actors, now in the order serpent, woman, man. The judgment on the serpent opens with a curse formula (3:14), unlike the words addressed to the man and the woman (3:16–19). God does not curse them but announces the dire consequences of their disobedience. The man will “labor” and work in the fields and not feel he has achieved much (3:17). The woman

will “labor” in childbirth. This will cause her pain, yet she will desire¹⁸ intimacy with her husband who will want to rule over her (3:16). *Note carefully: this is the first and only time in Gen 1–3 the subordination of women is mentioned, and it is presented as a consequence of sin. It is not good; it is not the creation ideal.*

The traditional interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3

The conclusion that Gen 2:4–3:12 does not subordinate women to men before the Fall is now endorsed by almost all scholarly commentators.¹⁹ This is a sharp break from how Gen 2 and 3 were almost universally interpreted until the mid-twentieth century. In times past when patriarchy prevailed, Gen 2 and 3 were interpreted as a corrective to Gen 1, adding something not mentioned in the first account of creation. It was argued that the first creation story spoke of the equality of the sexes before God, a spiritual equality, and the second creation narrative spoke of woman’s subordination in God’s good creation before the Fall. Many mute details in Gen 2 and 3 were taken to indicate that before the Fall the man was set over the woman. In cultural contexts where the subordination of women was taken for granted, these arguments were self-evident and irrefutable. In contrast, in cultural contexts where the substantial equality of the sexes is normative, most commentators do not consider such arguments worth mentioning. The most common of these antiquated arguments are:²⁰

1. Adam is put in charge of the Garden. Adam indeed appears first in the Garden, but the whole narrative is about how Adam alone is “help-less.” The story reaches its climax when the man and woman stand side by side. To conclude that Adam was in authority over the woman because God spoke first to him after the Fall (3:9) is unconvincing. In the dramatic telling of the story in seven scenes the order in which the actors appear or are addressed changes constantly. If who appears first or second in each scene is highly significant, then some weighty point would need to be discovered in each instance; this cannot be done.

2. Woman was created second; therefore she is second in rank, subordinate. In Gen 1 humankind is created last yet is supreme, and in Gen 2 man is created after the earth yet rules over it. Chronological order does not imply subordination. John Calvin, with characteristic sharpness of mind, says the “argument that woman is subject because she was created second, does not seem very strong for John the Baptist went before Christ in time and yet was far inferior to him.”²¹

3. It was Adam who named the animals and the woman, and naming implies dominance or authority. It is unlikely that naming signifies authority,²² but even if it did, the woman did not exist when Adam named the animals. Adam names the woman after the Fall (Gen 3:20). What is more, this understanding of naming would make

Gen 2 directly contradict Gen 1:26–28 where God gives dominion over the animals to man and woman alike.

4. Woman was made for man, not man for woman. Yes, woman was made “for” Adam because he was “help-less,” inadequate on his own. And yes, Paul says this in making his argument that women should cover their heads when they lead in prayer and prophecy in church. However, he then says, almost as if correcting himself, “For just as woman came from man [in the Gen 2 narrative] so [now] man comes through woman” (1 Cor 11:12).

5. Woman was created as man’s helper, and helpers are subordinates. As noted previously, a helper can be a superior, an equal or a subordinate. The Hebrew of Gen 2:18–20 implies an equal helper and thus is best translated “partner.”

6. The Serpent tempted the woman because she was more prone to sin and error. An opposite and equally biased inference would be that the Serpent reasoned that if it could tempt the woman to sin the man would be a pushover. It took a superhuman being to lead the woman into sin; the man only needed another human being to suggest the idea.

Speaking specifically of these tendentious interpretations of mute details in Gen 2 and 3, Brueggemann says, “such exegesis betrays the text and is a good example of the ways our values and presuppositions control our exegesis.”²³ Despite the fact that the vast majority of contemporary scholarly commentators reject all of these insupportable impositions on the text, most complementarians support all or most of them, often adding one or two more.²⁴ They have to do this; they have no other option because their whole case for the permanent subordination of women is grounded on the premise that in creation, before the Fall, God gave the man authority over the woman, that the subordination of women is the creation ideal and thus continues even after the advent of Jesus Christ.

Before moving on, a crucial observation must be made: If women’s subordination is predicated on the subordination of the first woman before the Fall, then all women are subordinated to all men. Women’s subordination cannot be limited solely to marriage and the church. It is prescriptive for all of creation. It speaks of how the created world should be ordered. This was well-nigh universally believed until recent times. Christian men long opposed women rulers, women having the vote, women entering politics or various professions, and women’s access to higher education, because men believed God created woman as a class to be the subordinate sex.²⁵ The complementarian argument that women’s creation-based subordination only applies to marriage and the church is entirely novel and counter to their own most fundamental theological premise, that the subordination of women is grounded in creation.

The Roman Catholic interpretation of Genesis 1–3

Most complementarians reject outright any criticisms of their interpretation of Gen 1–3 or of the other two or three New Testament texts to which they appeal. In reply to their evangelical critics who give another interpretation of these texts, they accuse them of denying the authority of scripture, warning them that they are on the path that leads to theological liberalism.²⁶ What this counter charge implies needs to be made clear: Evangelicals who give another interpretation of the disputed texts are not simply opposing the complementarian position, they are opposing scripture itself. What *we* teach reflects the mind of God; what *you* teach does not! The consequence of this complementarian doctrinaire dismissal of the exegetical conclusions of fellow evangelicals is that the debate is now completely stalemated. Evangelical egalitarian interpretations of the key texts, no matter how cogent or well supported, are ruled out of court without any need to consider them. In an attempt to get my debating opponents to listen, I now bring a third voice to this crucial matter of the interpretation of Gen 1–3.

In his binding encyclical of 1988, *Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, Pope John Paul II, following the advice of the best of Roman Catholic biblical scholarship, ruled that Genesis teaches the “essential equality” of the two sexes, “their fundamental equality” in marriage, and that the subordination of women is entirely a consequence of the Fall to be opposed.²⁷ On this last matter he says, “the overcoming of this evil inheritance is, generation after generation, the task of every human being, whether woman or man.”²⁸ By endorsing the scholarly contemporary interpretation of Gen 1–3, the Pope broke completely with the interpretation of Gen 2 and 3 that prevailed for centuries. His interpretation of Gen 1 to 3 is now binding on 450 million Roman Catholics. No Roman Catholic commentator can argue otherwise without acknowledging that he or she is contradicting the official teaching of the Catholic Church. What should also be noted before moving on is that this Roman Catholic interpretation of Gen 1–3 is virtually the same as that held by most Protestant exegetes and by all evangelical egalitarians.

Again, like evangelical egalitarians, the Pope not only emphatically endorses the “essential equality” of the sexes, but also their indelible, creation-given differentiation and complementarity. He speaks of “the creator’s decision that human beings should always and only exist as woman or man.”²⁹ In his exposition of Gen 2 he says the creation of the woman supplies what is lacking in the solitary Adam, a partner “in common humanity,” yet woman and not man.³⁰ Then referring to the penultimate verse in Gen 2, the Pope writes, “the biblical account speaks of God instituting marriage as an indispensable condition for the transmission of life to a new generation.”³¹ In marriage there is a “unity of the two,” a reflection of the trinitarian communion of love that is God. “In the unity of the two, man and woman are called from the

beginning not only to ‘exist side by side,’ or ‘together,’ but they are also called to exist mutually ‘one for the other.’”³²

The hermeneutical guidelines the Pope lays down are important to note. He first of all rules that in interpreting Gen 1–3, “no essential contradiction between the two texts” (Gen 1 and 2–3) can be allowed. And second, to ensure this is the case, Gen 2:18–24 should be interpreted in “the light” of Gen 1 which unambiguously speaks of the “essential equality” of the sexes and of their “shared dominion.” When read on this basis, he says, Gen 2:18–25 “helps us to understand better what we find in the concise passage of Genesis 1:27–28.” We see “even more profoundly the fundamental truth” that man and woman are essentially equal before the Fall.³³

What Roman Catholics have now concluded to be the right interpretation of Gen 1–3 is tremendously important for all Christians. It means that on this question, most scholarly commentators, all evangelical egalitarians and all Roman Catholics are basically of one mind. Gen 1–3 speaks of the essential and substantial equality of the sexes, their indelible differentiation, and their complementarity, seeing the subordination of women as entirely a consequence of the Fall.

Unfortunately, when Pope John Paul II addresses the ordination of women to the priesthood he lacks consistency. In response to the pressing calls to open up this issue he published in 1994 another encyclical, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis: On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone*.³⁴ He rules that only men can be priests. The reasons he gives are, 1. ordaining men only to the priesthood is the constant tradition of the church; 2. Jesus appointed men only to be numbered among the twelve apostles; 3. the twelve apostles formed a “ministerial priesthood,” as did those whom they “chose [to be] fellow workers who would succeed them in their ministry.”³⁵ He asserts that appointing men only to the priesthood on this basis in no way denigrates women or indicates their subordinate status.³⁶ Most people believe it does both these things. It would seem that the Pope wants to endorse on the basis of Gen 1–3 the essential and substantive equality of the sexes in the home and the world, but when it comes to the church he cannot allow women to be priests, the highest honor in the Roman Catholic Church.

What the Pope and complementarians teach on women in leadership in the church is to be contrasted not compared. First, they categorically differ on what is to be denied to women. The Pope excludes women from being priests because he cannot allow women to preside at the Eucharist, the most important aspect of Catholic worship. Complementarians exclude women from being pastors because they cannot allow them to preach or teach in church, what is most important in church worship for them. And second, they categorically differ on why women must be denied these things. For the Pope, women cannot be priests and thus preside at the Eucharist because he holds that the twelve male apostles were the first priests. For complementarians, women cannot be

pastors and thus preach or teach in church because women are the subordinate sex; they should not lead a congregation. For the Pope, women are not subordinated to men, the two sexes are essential equals; for complementarians, the pastor is not a priest and the Lord's Supper is not a sacrificial offering to God. The question these observations raise is this: Is the opposition to women in church leadership predicated on an agreed undisclosed premise—namely that women should be excluded from doing what is thought to be most important in church gatherings—and then theological reasons for such exclusions are found in Catholic and Protestant theology which sound plausible?

Conclusion

The information outlined above indicates that Gen 1–3 speaks of the substantial and essential equality of the two sexes, the subordination of women being entirely a consequence of the Fall. The evidence is compelling and the support far reaching. This is a devastating finding for contemporary complementarians who ground their entire case for the permanent subordination of women on the premise that before the Fall woman was subordinated to man. According to their interpretation of Gen 2–3 the hierarchical ordering of the sexes is the creation-given ideal that is universally and transculturally binding on all Christians. If this conclusion is exegetically mistaken and untrue then the complementarian position is an impressive edifice without any biblical or theological foundation. It is bound to collapse.

Notes

1. I thank Denise Cooper-Clark, Paul Collier, Lindsay Wilson and Richard Hess for reading this essay and making helpful suggestions. Part 2 of this article, to be published in the next edition of *Priscilla Papers*, examines the key terms “equality,” “difference,” “role” and “complementarity.”

2. In this essay, I speak of those who argue for the creation-given subordination of women as “complementarians” because since 1990 this has been their self-designation. This term, however, is problematic, for who would deny that the sexes complement each other? Evangelical egalitarians certainly endorse the complementarity of the sexes. Indeed, the definitive collection of evangelical egalitarian essays, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, is subtitled, “Complementarity without Hierarchy” (Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca M. Groothuis, eds. [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005]).

3. Daniel Doriani, “A History of the Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2,” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15* (ed. A. J. Köstenberger, T. R. Schreiner, H. S. Baldwin; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 258, n. 180, in reference to John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991).

4. The discipline of Canonical Criticism supports this conclusion. How the Bible's story is told is part of divine revelation. See R. Schultz, “What is ‘Canonical’ about Canonical Biblical Theology?” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. S. J. Hafemann; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 83–99; B. S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context* (London: SCM, 1992).

5. No longer can the Hebrew word *adam* in Gen 1:26 and 27 be accurately translated into English as “man” because the English word

“man” has become identified with the male sex. In Gen 1 to 3 *adam* is used in three ways: of humanity which is either male or female, of the solitary “man” of Gen 3:7–20 who is depicted as incomplete and “help-less” apart from woman, and as the personal name of the husband of Eve, a name implied in Gen 3 and made explicit in Gen 4:25. Nothing should be made of the fact that the Hebrew *adam* is a masculine noun; grammatical gender is not prescriptive of sexual identity and Hebrew has no other word for humanity. See R. Hess, “Splitting the Adam: The Usage of *ADAM* in Genesis i–v,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup XLI; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1–15.

6. Andreas Köstenberger, *God, Marriage and the Family* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 34. Italics added.

7. Raymond Ortland, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship Genesis 1–3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood*, 99.

8. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teachers and Preachers* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 41.

9. For more on the appropriation of Gen 1–3 in the NT see V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17* (NICOT 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 182–85.

10. Modern scholarly commentators are basically agreed that how Paul may understand what it means to be made in the image of God does not prescribe the historical meaning of Gen 1:27–28. Paul speaks of the image of God at least six times. Once he speaks of men bearing the image of God and women the glory of God (1 Cor 11:7). This could be, and has been, taken to mean women do not bear the image of God, which would contradict Gen 1:26–27. In 2 Cor 3:18 and Col 3:10 he speaks of Christians being renewed in the image of God, whereas in Genesis even after the Fall humankind is still considered to be made in God's image (Gen 9:6). Twice Paul speaks of Christ as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4, Col 1:15), something Gen 1 does not envisage. Paul often gives an interpretation of an OT passage counter to the historical meaning of the original (e.g., 1 Cor 10:1–6, Gal 4:21–31, Eph 4:8). Consider also that one OT text can be interpreted by NT writers in more than one way; Abraham's faith is a classic example (Rom 4:1–24, Gal 3:1–18, Heb 11:8–12, Jas 2:18–25).

11. Although the Genesis text arguably presents Adam as also deceived.

12. The exceptional verb *authenthein* in 1 Tim 2:10 speaks of usurped authority and thus bears the force of putting yourself first. See Philip Payne, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 385–94. On this passage, see Payne, *Man and Woman*, 291–360.

13. This Greek word signifies a break with what has just been said to give another perspective that is central to an argument. See Payne, *Man and Woman*, 189.

14. I am of course not suggesting that how our sexual identities are expressed at differing times and in differing cultures cannot change or differ. In the second part of this essay I will consider in more detail the inappropriateness of the term “role” to speak of male-female differences.

15. Werner Neurer, *Man and Woman in Christ in Christian Perspective* (trans. Gordon Wenham; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 30.

16. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–5* (WBC 1; Dallas: Word, 1987), 68.

17. This reminds us of the eschatological nature of salvation history. The perfecting of creation lies in the consummation of the new creation on the last day. We do not look back to the first creation to find God's perfected world, but to the future when there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

18. Much ink has been spilt by complementarians arguing that woman's desire after the Fall is to rule over her husband. Based on linguistic parallels, I am skeptical of this argument. Like Wenham,

Genesis, 82, I see it as only a possibility, not able to be proven. However, even if accepted it is not an interpretation inimical to egalitarians. They believe the creation ideal before the Fall is an equal relationship. If after the Fall the woman desires to rule over the man, that is as much a reflection of sin as is the man ruling over the woman.

19. In post 1980 commentaries see Brueggemann, *Genesis*; J. J. Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers and Preachers* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982); Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*; R. F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); M. Maher, *Genesis* (Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1982); C. Amos, *The Book of Genesis* (Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 2004); T. L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue* (Oxford: OUP, 2001); T. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *NIB*; R. J. Clifford and R. E. M. O'Carroll, "Genesis," in *NJBC*; W. S. Towner, *Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); M. Kessler and K. Deurloo, *A Commentary on Genesis* (New York: Paulist, 2004); D. S. Briscoe, *The Communicator's Commentary on Genesis* (Waco: Word, 1987); D. W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003); L. A. Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield: Academic, 2000); J. E. Hartley, *Genesis* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000); J. McKeown, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), R. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996); B. T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009); J. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. T. Longman and D. E. Garland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). For the same opinion before 1980 see J. A. Skinner, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930); U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (2 vols.; trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961); B. Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (London: G. Chapman, 1977); R. Davidson, *Genesis 1-11* (Cambridge: CUP, 1973); G. Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John Marks; London: SCM, 1961); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; New York: Doubleday, 1969). In support of Gen 2-3 teaching the pre-Fall subordination of the woman, Wenham sees this suggested only in the naming of the animals and the "naming" of the woman 'ishah (*Genesis*, 68, 81)! He rejects that the Hebrew usually translated "helper" implies a subordinate helper. For a complete endorsement of the complementarian interpretation of Gen 1-3, utilizing the language of role differentiation, see K. A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26* (NAC 1; Nashville: Broadman, 1996), 209-22, and B. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

20. Payne, *Man and Woman*, 41-52, rebuts eleven such arguments. In *Created Woman* (Canberra: Acorn, 1985), I critically evaluate six of these arguments in some detail. In *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 145-54, I document the "traditional" case for women's subordination.

21. John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, and the *Epistles of Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (trans. T. A. Smal; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 217.

22. See Richard Hess, "Equality without Innocence: Genesis 1-3," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 79-95.

23. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 50.

24. In support of this assertion I only reference the most authoritative voices for the complementarian position: Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2004), 102-109, 293-96; Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2006), 35-42; Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship," 95-112; *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis*, 134-46, 202-205, 246, 259.

25. I document this pre-twentieth century almost universal belief in *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, 145-48.

26. For example, the title of Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism*.

27. Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women* (Homebush, NSW, Boston: St. Paul, 1988), 32-41.

28. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 41.

29. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7.

30. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 23.

31. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

32. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24-25.

33. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 21-24.

34. John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis: On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone* (Homebush, NSW, 1994).

35. John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 5-6.

36. John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 6.

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Tamar's Voice of Wisdom and Outrage in 2 Samuel 13

DEIRDRE BROUER

"Tamar lived desolate in the house of her brother Absalom" (2 Sam 13:20). These words have given me both heartache and comfort. Heartache because I don't want Tamar's story to end this way. Comfort because Tamar's desolation validates my own desolation. "Desolation"¹ describes the barren woman, a desert wilderness, and the destruction of Jerusalem.² Jerusalem's desolation is described contrary to the creation account: formless and empty,³ dark, and isolated.⁴ To live desolate means to live lifeless,⁵ a common reality for those who suffer the impact of sexual abuse. Millions worldwide live in this reality: men and women, young and old, rich and poor. Even the daughter of King David.

Tamar was a beautiful princess from the tribe of Judah.⁶ Her father was a former shepherd from Bethlehem;⁷ her mother was the daughter of a Canaanite king.⁸ Tamar grew up in the palace of Jerusalem and lived during Israel's golden years under the reigns of her father, David (1010–970 BC), and her half-brother Solomon (970–930 BC). Tamar was the daughter of the messianic forerunner, the chosen and anointed one, the man after God's heart.⁹ She was the only daughter of David named alongside nineteen of David's sons.¹⁰

Tamar was raped, silenced, and left desolate by Amnon, David's firstborn son and heir to the Davidic throne,¹¹ within the palace of the king. But her story does not end here. Tamar has a voice, and her community has made sure that her voice is not silenced. This community, represented by the biblical writers, stands with Tamar, validates her voice, and acknowledges her suffering. Through the biblical writers we hear Tamar's voice of wisdom and outrage.

Tamar's voice of wisdom and outrage testifies to her courage, godliness, and pain. She speaks powerfully and relevantly today to those who live in desolation. Hearing Tamar requires close attention to her words and actions, for the narrator has added volume to her voice. As we approach 2 Sam 13, emphasis will be given to key words and themes employed by the narrator.¹² We begin by situating 2 Sam 13 within its historical and literary context.

Historical and literary context (2 Sam 13:1–22)

Tamar speaks in the account of the rise and fall of the Davidic kingdom which emphasizes Israel's division, idolatry, and exile. This broader narrative begins with a desolate woman (Hannah, 1 Sam 1:2) and ends with a desolate nation (2 Kgs 25:1–21). The rape of Tamar marks a pivotal point in the book of 2 Samuel and in David's kingship. Indeed, 2 Sam 13:1–22 was written

as a chiasm.¹³ The first ten chapters record David's success and victories¹⁴ and portray a united Israel, while the last ten chapters record David's failures and decline and a divided Israel. Near the center of this book are the narratives of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11) and Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam 13). Between these two narratives, Nathan prophesies that calamity will come upon David through his family (2 Sam 12:10–11).

Calamity strikes David's family when the firstborn son of David and Bathsheba dies. This death is followed by the birth of Solomon, Tamar's younger half-brother and the inspiration for the book of Proverbs (Prov 1:1). Solomon personifies wisdom as a woman who speaks truth (Prov 8:7), gives instruction and knowledge (Prov 8:10), brings life (Prov 3:18, 8:35, 16:22), enables kings

to reign (Prov 8:15), and possesses counsel, sound judgment, understanding, strength, and power (Prov 8:14). These characteristics of wisdom are embodied in Tamar, who suffers calamity at the hand of her brother Amnon. We now proceed to 2 Sam 13 to listen to Tamar's voice of wisdom and outrage.

Tamar offers life-giving sustenance (2 Sam 13:1–9)

Tamar is described as a beautiful¹⁵ sister who obediently prepares sustenance in order to sustain her "sick" half-brother Amnon. According to the narrator, Amnon made himself sick with frustration because of his love for Tamar, her virginity, her relationship to Absalom,¹⁶ and the impossibility of doing "anything"¹⁷ to her. This description of Amnon casts him in a suspicious light.

Amnon's distress over Tamar's virginity is incongruent with his love for her. Tamar's virginity is a valuable commodity and a significant source of family pride and honor rather than a cause for distress. Her virginity ensures her marriageability, status, and future. As her brother, Amnon is obligated to protect her virginity and his family's honor. The narrator discloses a deceptive and manipulative plan that evolves from Amnon's frustration and "sickness," raising even more suspicion about Amnon.

Amnon willingly listens to the voice of his cousin Jonadab, who concocts a plan to exploit family relationships and obligations of hospitality. Jonadab advises Amnon to lie down, make himself sick, and request that David send Tamar to "sustain" (*brh*) him with "sustenance" (*bryh*) from her hand.¹⁸ Amnon follows Jonadab's advice, David fulfills Amnon's request, and Tamar obeys David's command.

Amnon requests that David send Tamar to come and make two special cakes (*lbb*)¹⁹ before his eyes. The sustenance that Amnon desires resembles the Hebrew word for “heart” (*lb*). Tamar is sent to Amnon with sustenance intended to revive and restore his heart.²⁰ The narrator portrays Tamar as an obedient daughter and loyal sister who diligently works to sustain her sick brother. Tamar offers life-giving sustenance to Amnon through her laborious efforts.

Tamar offers life-giving wisdom (2 Sam 13:9–13)

Tamar does what is expected of her by fulfilling Amnon’s request. Amnon, however, does the unexpected and commands everyone to leave. He commands Tamar to come to the bedroom so that he may be sustained from her hand. Everyone leaves, and Tamar comes to the bedroom to offer sustenance from her hand. As soon as Tamar comes near, Amnon seizes her and commands her: Come, lie with me, my sister!²¹ Tamar, however, resists Amnon with wisdom and outrage: No, my brother! Do not rape me because this is not done in Israel! Do not do this outrage!

Tamar first says, No! She is the only person in the narrative who stands up to Amnon. By defying Amnon, Tamar aligns with the laws of Israel (Deut 22:20–29). Amnon is required by law to honor Tamar’s voice of refusal. By calling Amnon “my brother,” Tamar confronts Amnon with his brotherly obligation to protect her sexuality, status, and wellbeing. She explicitly commands Amnon not to “rape” (*nh*)²² her, accurately discerning Amnon’s request to “lie” (*shkb*) with her as rape. Tamar warns Amnon that what he intends to do is not done in Israel, the kingdom which Amnon himself is expected to rule.

Tamar orders Amnon, Do not do this outrage! The word “outrage” (*nblh*)²³ occurs only in extreme circumstances that threaten the life of not only an individual but also the community.²⁴ Examples of outrages include rape,²⁵ violating YHWH’s covenant, not speaking truthfully about YHWH,²⁶ and repaying good with evil.²⁷ Amnon would know that those who commit an outrage in Israel are put to death.²⁸ Tamar commands Amnon not to risk his life and kingship by committing a godless abomination²⁹ in the land of Israel, whose ultimate king is YHWH. Tamar speaks outrage on behalf of the nation of Israel, and she offers Amnon wise counsel in order to deter his course of action.

Tamar wisely appeals to Amnon’s compassion and reason: Where would I go with my disgrace? You will be like one of the godless fools in Israel! Tamar asks Amnon to consider what will happen to both of them if he rapes her. Tamar will lose her marriageability, identity, status, and future; Amnon will become a godless fool (*nabal*) who commits an outrage (*nebalah*) in Israel. A *nabal* is one who is foolish, godless, evil, associated with Belial,³⁰ and an enemy of David and YHWH.³¹ Tamar warns Amnon that he is in danger of aligning with evil and opposing both the king and the God of Israel.

After Tamar voices wisdom and outrage, she devises an honest and straightforward plan: Please speak to the king,

for he will not withhold me from you. By addressing their father as “the king,” Tamar reminds Amnon that their father is the highest human authority in the kingdom; violating Tamar would be a violation against their father and king.³² However, Tamar assures that the king will give his permission and blessing if Amnon abides by the laws and customs of the kingdom.³³ Tamar confronts evil with truth and offers Amnon life-giving wisdom.

Amnon commits an outrage (2 Sam 13:14–15)

Tamar, unlike Jonadab, counsels with truth and wisdom. According to the narrator, however, Amnon is not willing to listen to Tamar’s voice. Amnon ignores her voice and acts as though she has not even spoken. The narrator testifies that Amnon overpowers Tamar and rapes her. Through his testimony, the narrator aligns with Tamar and validates her voice by repeating Tamar’s words.³⁴ The narrator portrays Amnon as a godless fool who has disregarded the voice of wisdom and committed an outrage in Israel.

The narrator clarifies that Amnon does not love Tamar; he intensely hates her. Instead of wanting Tamar near him, he wants rid of her. Amnon had commanded Tamar, Come! Lie! Now he commands, Rise! Go!³⁵ Tamar again resists with wisdom and outrage.

Tamar is discarded (2 Sam 13:16–18)

Tamar again confronts Amnon: No! Sending me away is a greater evil than what you have already done to me! Tamar again says, No! Cultural and familial obligations obligate Amnon to protect and provide for her.³⁶ By raping Tamar, Amnon has dishonored her, himself, and their family and has jeopardized Tamar’s status, wellbeing, and future. Tamar voices Amnon’s intention to disregard her as evil. Amnon, however, remains unwilling to listen.

According to the narrator, Amnon had first been unwilling to listen to Tamar’s voice. Now he is unwilling to listen to her. The narrator indicts Amnon through Amnon’s own speech and actions. Amnon gives another command, this time to his servant: Please send this away from me outside, and bolt the door after her. Amnon humiliates and dehumanizes Tamar by commanding a servant to throw “this” out.³⁷

The narrator responds to Amnon’s command by highlighting Tamar’s garment, which is reminiscent of Joseph’s and symbolizes her special status with her father as a royal daughter of the king.³⁸ Her garment represents her virginity, which ensures her marriageability, status, and future. Rather than confronting Amnon, the servant boy throws the royal daughter of the king outside and bolts the door after her. Amnon casts out his sister who is in pain and need.³⁹ He discards the one who offers life-giving sustenance.

Tamar is desolate (2 Sam 13:19–22)

Thrown outside and locked out, the narrator stands by Tamar’s side, bearing witness to her pain and suffering. First, Tamar

puts ashes upon her head, voicing her devastation and grief.⁴⁰ Second, she tears her special garment, voicing tragedy and death.⁴¹ Third, she cries out, voicing injustice, oppression, and anguish.⁴² Tamar openly acknowledges the outrage that Amnon has committed and the devastation she feels. Amnon, however, does not respond.

Tamar is raped, discarded, and left desolate, but her family responds with silence. Absalom minimizes the rape⁴³ and commands Tamar to be silent and not to set her heart on “this matter.”⁴⁴ David does nothing, even though an outrage has been committed in his family and kingdom.⁴⁵ As father, David is required to act on behalf of his daughter;⁴⁶ as king, he is obligated to uphold the laws of Israel.⁴⁷ The daughter of David lives desolate, and calamity within David’s family escalates into calamity within his kingdom.⁴⁸

Absalom hates Amnon, kills him,⁴⁹ and declares war against David.⁵⁰ The rape of Tamar evolves into the deaths of twenty thousand (2 Sam 18:7). The kingdom of David becomes ravaged by war, a foreshadowing of Jerusalem’s invasion, exile, and desolation. Jerusalem, like Tamar, is described as a virgin daughter of Judah,⁵¹ naked,⁵² hated,⁵³ and desolate.⁵⁴ Both cry out in devastation and grief.⁵⁵ Both receive honor and restoration.⁵⁶

Tamar receives honor and restoration not only through her voice of wisdom and outrage but also through her prestigious position in David’s genealogy. Tamar’s name is strategically placed, preceding Solomon and the kingly line of Judah (1 Chr 3:9–16). Tamar’s legacy continues through Absalom’s daughter, also named Tamar,⁵⁷ and through the kings of Judah. She offers life and sustenance to those who fellowship with her in her suffering and find comfort and strength in her voice of wisdom and outrage.

Conclusion

Tamar lived desolate, but her testimony does not end in desolation. Tamar’s voice of wisdom and outrage continues to speak today. The biblical writers have honored and preserved her voice for those willing to listen. She offers life-giving sustenance through her words of wisdom and her outrage against evil. Tamar confronts evil with truth and speaks with authority on behalf of the narrator and the laws and wisdom of Israel. The narrator validates Tamar’s voice and bears witness to the multidimensional violence,⁵⁸ consequences, and devastation of rape. Amnon represents godless foolishness, while Tamar represents godly wisdom.

Indeed, Amnon forsakes wisdom (cf. Prov 4:6), does not love wisdom (cf. Prov 4:6), and fails to call wisdom “my sister” (cf. Prov 7:4). Because Amnon does not listen to wisdom, he forfeits life and favor from the LORD (cf. Prov 8:34–35). Amnon hates wisdom and, therefore, loves death (cf. Prov 8:36).

In contrast, both Tamar and wisdom call out (cf. Prov 1:20–21), raise their voice (cf. Prov 8:1, 4), and speak what is right and true (cf. Prov 8:6–7). Both fear the LORD and hate

evil, pride, and perverse speech (cf. Prov 8:13). Both stretch out their hands (cf. Prov 1:24), offering health, nourishment, and life (cf. Prov 3:8, 18, 22, 4:22, 8:5, 35). Both possess sound judgment, understanding, and power (cf. Prov 8:14). Both offer advice and rebuke (cf. Prov 1:22–23) yet are rejected and ignored (cf. Prov 1:24–25). Tamar is remembered as a wise and valiant⁵⁹ woman (cf. Prov 31:10) who offers life and does good and not evil (cf. Prov 31:12). She provides sustenance for her family and girds herself with strength (cf. Prov 31:15, 17). She extends her hands to the needy (cf. Prov 31:20) and wears fine linen, strength and honor (cf. Prov 31:22, 25). Tamar speaks wisdom and the law of loving-kindness (cf. Prov 31:26). As a woman who fears the LORD, she is praised (cf. Prov 31:30) and honored within the messianic line of Judah (1 Chr 3:9–16).

Notes

1. *Shamam* occurs 91 times in the OT, predominantly in prophetic texts (62 times) and “occurs most frequently (55 times) with the sense to suffer destruction.” Tyler F. Williams, *NIDOTTE*, 4:168. *Shamam* appears only 8 times in reference to people (2 Sam 13:20, Isa 54:1, 62:4, Lam 1:13, 16, 3:11, 4:5, Job 16:7).

2. Isa 54:1 (barrenness); Gen 47:19, Deut 32:10, Isa 64:10 (wilderness); Isa 24:12, 49:19, 62:4, 64:10, Jer 4:27, Lam 1:4, 5:18, Ezek 23:33, 33:28–29, 36:34–36, Zech 7:14 (destruction of Jerusalem).

3. Jer 4:23. The phrase *tohu vabohu*, “formless and empty,” appears in Gen 1:2 and Jer 4:23, cf. Isa 34:11. The LXX translates *tohu vabohu* in Gen 1:2 as “invisible and unformed” and in Jer 4:23 as “nothing.”

4. Jer 4:23, cf. Gen 1:2–3 (dark); Jer 4:25, cf. Gen 1:20–21, 26–27 (isolated).

5. Jer 4:26, cf. Gen 1:11–12.

6. Tamar means “palm tree,” which is associated with fertility. See Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, “Amnon and Tamar: A Matter of Honor (2 Samuel 13:1–38),” in *Crossing Boundaries and Linking Horizons* (ed. Gordon D. Young, Mark W. Chavalas, and Richard E. Averbeck; Bethesda: CDL, 1997), 353.

7. 1 Sam 16:1, 11, 2 Sam 7:8.

8. Tamar’s mother was Maacah (2 Sam 3:3, 13:4, 1 Chr 3:2), mentioned after Ahinoam (mother of David’s firstborn, Amnon) and Abigail (mother of David’s second-born, Kileab). Maacah was daughter of King Talmai of Geshur (2 Sam 13:37). Geshur was a small Canaanite kingdom that Israel failed to conquer (Josh 13:13), located at the eastern border of the Sea of Galilee in the Bashan (Deut 3:14, Josh 12:5, 13:11).

9. Pss 18:50, 89:20–29, Isa 9:1–7, 11:1, 10, Matt 1:1, Rom 1:3–4, Rev 5:5 (messianic forerunner); 1 Sam 16:1, 12, 2 Sam 7:5–16, 19:21, 23:1 (chosen and anointed); 1 Sam 13:14, Acts 13:22; cf. 2 Sam 7:8, 1 Chr 17:7; Jer 23:5–6, Ezek 34:23–24, 37:24–25 (man after God’s own heart).

10. 2 Sam 5:13–16, 1 Chr 3:1–9.

11. 2 Sam 3:2, 1 Chr 3:1.

12. The narrator’s voice represents the divine perspective. See Miriam J. Bier, “Colliding Contexts,” in *Tamar’s Tears* (ed. Andrew Sloane; Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 175. Charles Conroy attests that Tamar’s words reflect the narrator’s point of view. Conroy, *1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 118–19.

13. George Ridout, “The Rape of Tamar: A Rhetorical Analysis of 2 Samuel 13:1–22,” in *Rhetorical Criticism* (ed. Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974), 81; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (4 vols.; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 1:100.

14. See 2 Sam 5:1–25, 6:1–19, 7:1–29, 8:1–14, 10:1–19.
15. Tamar's brother Absalom is also described as "beautiful" (*yph*) (2 Sam 14:25).
16. Absalom is David's third son and Tamar's full brother. Amnon's frustration over Tamar's relationship to Absalom alludes to sibling rivalry. Absalom's name forms a literary inclusio around 2 Sam 13–14, which reveals his significance in the larger narrative though he is largely absent from 2 Sam 13:1–22. Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 560.
17. As a virgin daughter of the king, Tamar would have been well-guarded and protected. Robert P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 262; David G. Firth, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 436.
18. *Brh* means "eat" and "food" (BDB 136) and appears 6 times in this narrative (2 Sam 13:5–7, 10). David had refused to sustain (*brh*) himself after Joab murdered Abner (2 Sam 3:35) and after his first son with Bathsheba became fatally ill (2 Sam 12:17); cf. Lam 4:10. *Bryh* appears only in this narrative (2 Sam 13:5, 7, 10).
19. "Bake" and "cake" come from the same root (*lbb*) and resemble the words "heart" (*lb*) and "flame" (*lbh*). This may have been a special cake baked over flames; Jackie A. Naudé, *NIDOTTE* 3:754. Tivka Frymer-Kensky suggests that the name of this cake indicates either its shape (heart-shaped) or its function (to strengthen the heart of the sick person). Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 159; Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 267.
20. Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989; repr., New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 254; Alter, *The David Story*, 266.
21. "Seize" is *hazaq*; cf. Deut 22:25, Judg 19:25. For the command, cf. Gen 39:7, 12.
22. Gen 34:2, Deut 22:29, Judg 19:24, 20:5.
23. David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 5:595. *Nblh* occurs only 13 times in the OT. See also Deut 22:21, Jer 29:23.
24. Alice A. Keefe, "Rapes of Women/Wars of Men," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 82; Hilary B. Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 208; P. Kyle McCarter, *2 Samuel* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 328.
25. Gen 34:7, Judg 19:23–24, 20:6, 10.
26. Josh 7:15, Job 42:8.
27. 1 Sam 25:21–25.
28. Gen 34:25–27, Josh 7:25, Judg 20:46, 1 Sam 25:38.
29. HALOT 1:663; TLOT 2:713. See also TDOT 9:171; Anthony Phillips, "Nebalah—A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct," *VT* 25 (1975): 237–38; Frank M. Yamada, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible: A Literary Analysis of Three Rape Narratives* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 7; and DCH 5:595. *Nbl* appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 7:9) in reference to offenses against the community, and *nblh* appears in 1QS 10:21f and in connection with "Belial" (TDOT 9:171).
30. 1 Sam 25:17, 25, 39. Belial means "worthlessness, wickedness, destruction" (BDB 116) and conveys death (2 Sam 16:7, 22:5–6). According to Robert G. Boling, Belial is "one of the most maleficent characters of the mythic underworld." Boling, *Judges* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 276. See Judg 19:22, 20:13.
31. 1 Sam 25:21–22, Deut 32:6, Pss 14:1, 74:18, 22.
32. Sexual offenses were considered not only offenses against the woman but also against her father. Yamada, *Configurations of Rape*, 116.
33. Cf. Gen 11:27–30, 20:2. Marriage between half-siblings would have been viewed as lawful rather than incestuous. Bar-Efrat,

Narrative Art, 239–40; Matthews and Benjamin, "Amnon and Tamar," 351.

34. The narrator here affirms Tamar's use of '*nh*, "rape" (2 Sam 13:12, 14, 22).
35. Cf. Judg 19:28.
36. Exod 22:16–17, Deut 22:28–29.
37. Contrast Gen 2:23, where *z'ot* ("this") is a term of endearment.
38. The only other time this garment is mentioned is in the Joseph narrative (Gen 37:3, 23, 31–33). Both Tamar and Joseph were described as beautiful (*yph*) (Gen 39:6, 2 Sam 13:1), were seen, desired, seized, and given the same command: "Lie with me!" (Gen 39:7, 12, 2 Sam 13:6–11). Both resisted with wisdom (Gen 39:8–9, 2 Sam 13:12–13, 16). Both were betrayed by their families.
39. Cf. Isa 32:6.
40. Cf. Josh 7:6, Esth 4:1, 3, Job 2:8, 12, Isa 61:3, Ezek 27:30.
41. Cf. Gen 37:31–34, Josh 7:6, 1 Sam 4:12, 2 Sam 1:11, 1 Kgs 11:29–33, Ezra 9:3, Esth 4:1, Job 1:20, 2:12.
42. Cf. Gen 4:10, 18:20, Exod 22:22–23, Deut 22:27, Jer 20:8, Ezek 9:8, Hab 1:2 (injustice); Exod 2:23, Deut 26:7, Pss 22:5, 107:13 (oppression); Ezek 27:30–31, Pss 88:1, 107:6, 142:5–6, Lam 3:8 (anguish).
43. Instead of asking if Amnon had "raped" her, Absalom asks if Amnon had "been with" her (2 Sam 13:20).
44. Cf. Jonadab's advice to David in 2 Sam 13:33.
45. Dinah's father Jacob was also silent and did nothing in response to the rape of his daughter (Gen 34:5). The LXX and 4QSam state that David did nothing "because David loved Amnon since he was his firstborn."
46. Exod 22:16–17, Deut 22:28–29.
47. Deut 17:18–19.
48. 2 Sam 15:14, 17:1–4, 11–13, 18:3, 6–7.
49. 2 Sam 13:22–29.
50. 2 Sam 15:10–14, 16:11, 15–16, 19:10. The rapes of Dinah (Gen 34) and the Bethlehemite woman (Judg 19) also resulted in war. Both Tamar's brother and Dinah's brothers initiated revenge deceitfully and took justice into their own hands.
51. 2 Sam 13:1–2, 18, Lam 1:15, 2:13.
52. 2 Sam 13:14, Ezek 16:39.
53. 2 Sam 13:15, Ezek 23:29.
54. 2 Sam 13:20, Isa 24:12, 49:19, 62:4, 64:10, Jer 27, Lam 1:4, 5:18, Ezek 23:33, 33:28–29, 36:34–36.
55. 2 Sam 13:19, Lam 1:2.
56. Ezek 36:34–36.
57. Absalom also had three sons, but the text only names his daughter (2 Sam 14:27, cf. 13:1).
58. Keefe, "Rapes of Women/Wars of Men," 91.
59. *Hayil*; cf. Ruth 3:11, 1 Sam 16:18, 2 Sam 17:10; Prov 31: 29.

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The Book of Ruth as an Exemplar for Faith Communities

SAMUEL C. LONG

From beginning to end, the story of *Ruth* captures the attention of the reader.¹ Though a story of the ebb and flow of ancient human existence—famine and death, gleaning and feasting—the story and the character of Ruth have transcended these ordinary occurrences. *Ruth* contains many elements that make for good story—tragedy, conflict, romance, and redemption to name a few. This gripping story causes “the emotions of the reader to fluctuate between hope and despair until the very end when what began with multiple tragedies comes to a triumphant and happy conclusion.”² Perhaps the evocative nature of the story contributes to the vastly different uses of this book and the character of Ruth. Dante calls her the “gleaner-maid, meek ancestress” of David; Bunyan casts her as Christina’s youthful companion Mercy; and Milton uses Ruth as the paradigm for a virtuous young lady.³ Indeed, the book of *Ruth* continues to be one of the most beloved among the OT scriptures. In four short chapters, the author draws the reader into the ancient Israelite experience and tells a delightful story of faithfulness and redemption. When compared with OT literature containing harsh denunciations and warnings for the Israelites regarding their conduct, Ruth’s simple tale describing a time when Israelite society functioned as God intended is refreshing.⁴

Ruth continues to challenge the faith community by holding her up as a model to be emulated. Ruth’s life, faith, and faithfulness are the standard to which believers should compare themselves. Ruth has become more than a mere figure in Israelite history. She displays characteristics that epitomize a strong, faithful, God-fearing woman. Moreover, while living in a patriarchal society, Ruth vividly embodies someone who wants to contribute to the community despite obstacles and social mores. The book confronts nationalism, racism, bigotry, prejudices, and misogyny. As such, it still has much to teach our faith communities. To such ends, this article will focus on the nature of *Ruth* as an example of faithfulness and acceptance.⁵

Hesed⁶—the foundation of community

On the surface, *Ruth* appears to be a simple historical narrative about days gone by. However, closer study reveals rich theological application. The story is set in the time of the Judges (Ruth 1:1)—a distressing stretch of Israelite history to be sure. Over and over again, Judges portrays startling examples of individuals and the people of Israel as a whole disregarding the covenant by their treatment of each other and of God. Judges concludes with the worst of these accounts—a woman is raped, cut into twelve pieces, and civil war ensues (chs. 19–21). Despite the abuses and injustices so prevalent during this

time, the author of *Ruth* paints a picture of a time when the covenant was lived out and society worked as God intended. This setting, combined with heavy covenantal language,⁷ has led many to see *Ruth* as the supreme example of covenant living: “When Israel raises the question about the meaning and practice of covenant, she need only consider the interaction of Naomi and Ruth, the concern of Boaz, and the somewhat negative stance of the unnamed redeemer.”⁸ The story holds up Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz as the ideal for which the Israelites should strive.

While exploring the dynamic of the relationship between Ruth and Boaz, the author also sets up their treatment of one another as a witness to what God desires in all relationships. *Ruth* cannot be confined to a love story only. Rather, it is the story of *hesed*—of covenantal loyalty among people. While so much of the history of Israel concerns itself with God’s call to holiness, including holiness as a pattern of distinction from surrounding peoples, the book of *Ruth*

instead hones in on the message of *hesed*. Rabbi Ze’ira states, “This scroll is not concerned with either purity or defilement, either prohibition or permission. Why, then was it written? To teach you of a magnificent reward to those who practice and dispense *hesed*.”⁹ Similarly, Israel Bettan characterizes *Ruth* as “little concerned with what is clean and unclean, what is permitted or forbidden. It describes customs and practices, but with no attempt to confirm or deny their validity.”¹⁰ Instead of focusing on these customs, the author of *Ruth* chooses to explore the real application of these holiness laws—“the religion of love” that “exalts the magnanimous spirit.”¹¹ Indeed, the story of *Ruth* shows how one of the least of the Israelite community, one who was not even an Israelite by birth, could through her faithfulness play a part in bringing about David, and thereby join David as a hero of the faith.

Though the author exemplifies the characters of Ruth and Boaz as models of faithful living, he or she also sets up foils to these two. Orpah is not impugned for her choice to return home, yet she does not display the same remarkable character that Ruth does. Orpah does the expected in such a situation. In the same way, the unnamed near redeemer is not overtly critiqued, but Boaz’s actions are heralded as the appropriate standard. Neither Orpah’s nor the near kinsman’s actions are wrong; they are simply not equal to the extraordinary demands of *hesed*. Again, the author focuses on proper conduct yet makes it clear that matters such as caring for widows and keeping a family’s lineage intact are applications of *hesed*.

As we read, we see the way in which creation should work—according to *hesed*. By using a positive example of *hesed*, the

Neither Orpah’s nor the near kinsman’s actions are wrong; they are simply not equal to the extraordinary demands of *hesed*.

author displays the impact of right living and the blessings that follow from it. The characters are commended and rewarded for a lifestyle that takes one another's wellbeing into account, setting the example for all who come after them and take the message of *Ruth* to heart. Bettan summarizes, "[*Ruth*] teaches us of the great merit that inheres in the performance of kindly deeds. In other words, the law of kindness, which transcends national boundaries and makes all [humanity] kin, is the all embracing theme of the Book of *Ruth*."¹² Indeed, the most indicting aspect of *Ruth* is that true love, kindness and loyalty were displayed by a foreigner and by a woman. Though the story is entertaining and enjoyable, it is more than a mere moral tale to be told around the dinner table. *Ruth* provides edification, instruction and a challenge to the Israelites in what it means to reflect the *hesed* of their God.

Hesed as a response to national and gender bias

The import of *hesed* in *Ruth* can also be extended to bigotry in various forms. That is, the book functioned as a positive example for the community of Israel, displaying how they should live in faithfulness to outsiders in addition to one another. In such a light, *Ruth* takes on a polemical tone that chastises the Israelites for their chauvinism and provides an alternative to the nationalistic views expressed in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Thus the author may have had an implicit agenda to balance a radical understanding of holiness and nationalism with inclusion. As such, *Ruth* becomes protest literature.

If one accepts a post-exilic date, *Ruth* can be viewed as a statement against the nationalism that arose in the post-exilic period, especially in the form of prohibiting mixed marriages. By the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, the Israelites were being commanded to disassociate completely from foreigners, especially foreign wives. The OT presents precious few positive comments about foreigners; in fact, various OT texts show hostility towards the foreigner.¹³

Various other narratives also speak out strongly against association with the foreigner. When giving the Covenant Code, God promises he will go before them to wipe out the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivvites and Jebusites (Exod 22:23) so that they will not cause Israel to sin. The foreigners are to be conquered and killed, with no allowance for their presence or influence among the Israelites. Joshua implores the people to help fulfill this promise by completely wiping out the nations from the land of Canaan. The writer goes on to say that Joshua actually accomplished this extermination (Josh 11:12-14), but we find that various people remaining in the land. Though the command of God concerning dispossessing the Canaanites is clearly stated, it is not completely carried out. Judg 19, for example, depicts a man unwilling to enter Jebus (future Jerusalem) because it is a Jebusite city. He states in v. 12, "We will not turn aside into a city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel; but we will continue on to Gibeah" (NRSV).

Other examples could be cited to suggest a call to disassociation with foreign peoples.¹⁴ Nevertheless, early on in the history of Israel there is a general acceptance of foreign nations. Moses marries a Midianite and a Cushite (Num 12:1). Solomon has many foreign wives (1 Kgs 11:1-3). Granted, both men are critiqued for these relationships, yet this critique is later, implying that perhaps early on in Israelite history there had been more acceptance than many of the narratives and the laws permit. "The farther we move away from the historical situation the more rigid a picture appears, which shows that the laws gradually became idealized and unrealistic."¹⁵

As the destruction of Jerusalem draws near and continuing after the Babylonian exile, the prophets clearly voice their opposition to anything foreign, especially the gods and idols that the Israelites had been serving. Rendtorff suggests that this denunciation is in the context of Israel's struggle for identity (religious and national) and survival.¹⁶ While some of the law codes allow for care of foreigners, such a concept is not seen in much of the post-exilic literature. It is out of this opposition that Ezra and Nehemiah command the Israelites. Clearly the pain of the exile, which had resulted from foreign influence and idolatry, affects the way in which they approach the surrounding nations. The religious identity of the Israelites is no longer centered on the land but in strict adherence to the Torah. Rendtorff characterizes the content of Ezra to be dominated by the idea of separation and even, at times, hostility towards foreigners.¹⁷ Since Yahweh had been faithful and restored them to the land, the remnant could no longer live like those before the exile. They could not worship other gods or practice customs found in pagan nations. In addition, Ezra 10:10-11 calls for the divorce of all wives of foreign descent:

Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have trespassed and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. Now make confession to the LORD the God of your ancestors, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." (NRSV)

Nehemiah echoes this command in 13:3: "When the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent" (NRSV). The tone of Ezra-Nehemiah and the connection with the reading of the laws suggest an attempt to vilify the surrounding nations by hailing Israelite religion and life as supreme. Nehemiah paints a picture of disgust regarding foreign nations. Those nations could not speak the "language of Judah," and as a result neither could their children (Neh 13:23-24); Solomon is berated for marrying foreign women, and these women are blamed for his sins (Neh 13:26); and the marriage to foreign women is considered a great evil and treachery against God (Neh 13:27). More is going on with these divorces and separations than avoiding social pollution; the writers do not allow for the possibility

of conversion of foreign wives, and any mingling with them is considered sinful and inappropriate for a covenant people.

Thus, it has been proposed that the Book of *Ruth* was written out of this context. The author depicts Ruth as a foreigner who makes a conversion to Israelite culture and religion: “Your people will be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16b). This statement implies a full-fledged conversion.¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that Ruth is depicted as a Moabite and not an actual Israelite even toward the end of the book (Ruth 4:5, 10). Thus, the argument runs that *Ruth* is a protest—albeit a subtle one—against stringent nationalism, based on Ruth’s acceptance into Israelite society and on the subtle reminder that David’s great-grandmother was a Moabite.¹⁹

The inclusive understanding of the role of foreigners among the Israelites found in *Ruth* stands in tension with Ezra’s rejection of foreigners. *Ruth* in particular displays the ability for Israelites to live with, worship with, and marry foreigners while still maintaining their set-apart status before Yahweh. Though Ruth is a Moabite who should be shunned both from marriage and from worship (according to Ezra), she is chosen by the author to exemplify unselfish devotion that should mark the Israelite people.

The story of Ruth and Naomi can be seen together with other stories of the empowerment and liberation of OT women—such as Deborah, Rahab, Esther and Tamar. Many scholars see *Ruth* in a liberation and feminist light and as a “reaction to the limitations of patriarchal society.”²⁰ The story is set in ancient Israel—a patriarchal culture that would, at times, consider women to be property. Divorced women and widows would often have a difficulty surviving, much less thriving. Thus, the two female protagonists represent, “A daring model of a woman who acts decisively to create a future for herself in a patriarchal social context where no good future was on offer for her.”²¹ To accomplish their successful future, Ruth and Naomi must carefully plan and execute their plan in light of their society. A stigma already surrounds Ruth based on her status as a foreign, widowed woman, and a rejection by a leading man in the society would only deepen her dishonored status. In addition, she would lose any hope of future acceptance or provision. Indeed, “The story of Ruth is about the careful negotiation between a vulnerable outsider woman and a man of substance in the community, a negotiation that has to do with honor and shame, but that is also self-consciousness about economic issues in the exchange.”²²

Theological implications

The story of *Ruth* is different from many of the other theological texts in the OT. The story does not include angels,

theophanies, key religious leaders or military triumphs. Yet close analysis of the themes of the book show that the story of *Ruth* can still speak to the modern reader. We see the tale unfold before us and, like the original reader, are drawn into this tale in which various tragedies and setbacks are eventually overcome. We see how the presence of God, though seemingly distant and inactive, nonetheless has a hand in the positive

outcome. In Esther—another book often cited to show the providence of God—the author chooses to portray God as completely absent in name but present in the lives of the characters. The author of *Ruth* chooses to be less subtle since he or she does mention God’s name and intervention. A constant stream of blessings and invocations spoken in the name of

God, as well as Naomi’s complaint against him, pervade the story and create the impression that God is as much an actual character as Naomi or Boaz.²³ This concept of divine nearness is heightened by God’s faithfulness in answering every prayer offered up to him.²⁴ The very words of the characters express an understanding of how God is present, though invisible, and is expected to work out his will among his people.

However, God’s providence must be seen in light of the actions and responses of the characters—human protagonists still lead the charge for redemption: “God is present and active in the Ruth story especially in the way in which people behave toward one another.”²⁵ The correspondence of divine and human action can be seen through many examples. Boaz wishes that Ruth would find refuge under God’s wings, but he is the one who ultimately provides for her (2:12, 3:9). Naomi complains that Yahweh has brought her home “empty,” but Boaz cannot send Ruth back to her “empty” (1:21, 3:17). Naomi charges Yahweh with the responsibility of finding security for her daughters-in-law, but Ruth brings forth the plan to accomplish it (1:9, 3:1). Yahweh is blessed for maintaining *hesed*, yet Ruth clearly displays that characteristic as well (2:20, 3:10). Clearly, God works through these protagonists to bring about restoration. Circumstances may be out of our control—famine, death and unwillingness on the part of others to redeem or affirm us. Yet when the people of God live in faithfulness to one another, redemption does occur, just as God intends. The reader is reminded that *hesed* is the key element that makes up the moral order.²⁶ God sets the example of faithfulness and expects the creation to do the same. Indeed, God’s purpose for humanity and God’s providence over this world can be seen and celebrated through the actions of the characters throughout the book of *Ruth*.

The story of *Ruth* also sets up a model of inclusiveness, especially in regard to ethnicity. Ruth is depicted as a Moabite and not an actual Israelite even up to the end of the book. For the original readers, every use of the word “Moabite” would

cause a pang of anger and hostility towards the character of Ruth. Nevertheless, as a result of her declaration and desire to follow Naomi, Ruth eventually marries Boaz and becomes included in the nation of Israel, even the lineage of David. Indeed, “The story of Ruth and Naomi is a tale of human kindness and devotion transcending the limits of national- or self-interest.”²⁷ According to conventional wisdom, Ruth should have followed Orpah’s example and returned home to her own people, where she would be cared for and accepted. She chooses instead to support Naomi—and through Naomi, Yahweh. She chooses the possibility of being ostracized because of her nationality, relegated to a second-class citizen because of her gender, and ignored because of her widowed state. Ruth’s faithful choice leads to redemption for herself and for Naomi’s line. “The fact that redemption and restoration are bestowed on this seeming outsider highlights for us the equal status of all people in God’s eyes. The riches of the kingdom of God are available to all who call upon the LORD’s name.”²⁸

In spite of gender, ethnicity or any other quality that divides humanity, God still pours out grace upon all humanity, often through the work of the church in this world. *Ruth* clearly portrays the “Abiding story of humans who yearn to contribute to the community in the face of all obstacles.”²⁹ Ruth’s character provides an example of a resourceful woman who seeks the restoration of the various people in her life. *Ruth* challenges each of us to see where the *hesed* of God is breaking in, sometimes in unexpected places and people. More than that, *Ruth* paints the picture of the way community should be—filled with faithful people serving and caring for each other as God redeems our hopelessness and futility to produce everlasting results.

Notes

1. In an effort to distinguish the book and the person, the book of *Ruth* will be italicized and the person Ruth will be normal font.

2. Josiah Derby, “A Problem in the Book of Ruth,” *JBQ* 22 (1994): 185.

3. Edward Campbell Jr., *Ruth* (AB 7; New York: Doubleday, 1975), 3.

4. See Gary N. Knoppers, *Two Nations Under God: The Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies* (HSM 52–53; Atlanta: Scholars, 1993) and Klaus Koch, *The Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

5. A few caveats should be made as this task is undertaken. First, we should not assume a single purpose to this literature. Such an assumption does not do justice to the rich content that connects so many levels of meaning. The major understandings of *Ruth* are as follows: to maintain Israelite customs and encourage legal duties, to integrate law and daily life, to legitimize David and his monarchy, to tell a good story, to encourage proselytes, to promote universalism over against nationalism, to elevate the virtues of friendship and loyalty, to preserve women’s traditions, and to witness God at work. Second, since the dating and authorship are uncertain, the attempt to appropriate the text to a specific time and setting seems tenuous.

6. Consensus regarding a translation for the Hebrew word *hesed* is elusive. Kindness, steadfast love, and covenant faithfulness combine to define the idea behind the word. D. A. Baer and R. P. Gordon, *NIDOTTE* 2:211–18, note that *hesed* has a “strongly relational aspect that is essential to any proper definition.”

7. E.g., *hesed* “loyalty,” *goel* “redeemer,” *nahalal* “inheritance,” *qanah* “purchase.”

8. John Craghan, *Esther, Judith, Tobit, Jonah, Ruth* (OT Message 16; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982), 201.

9. *Ruth Rabba*, 2:15.

10. Israel Bettan, *The Five Scrolls* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1950), 49.

11. Bettan, *Five Scrolls*, 49.

12. Bettan, *Five Scrolls*, 53.

13. Various laws display the poor treatment of the foreigner: Exod 12:43 prohibits the foreigner from eating the Passover, and Lev 22:24–25 will not allow sacrifices to be made to Yahweh if the animal has been received from a foreigner. It is prohibited to charge interest on a loan made to an Israelite but permitted to charge a foreigner interest (Deut 23:20). In the Year of Jubilee, Israelite debts are required to be released, but not debts of a foreigner to an Israelite (Deut 15:1–3). The foreigner is not allowed to enter into the temple; Ezek 44:6–9 comes out strongly against this, calling it an abomination (*to’ebah*). In contrast, material such as Jonah and certain legal texts affirm the significance and rights of foreigners.

14. According to Gen 19, the beginning of the foreign nations of Moab and Amon stem from an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters. The forefather of the nation of Edom comes from Esau (Gen 25:30, 36:1, 8) who is portrayed as far less savvy than his brother Jacob, forefather of the Israelites.

15. Moshe Weinfeld, “The Ban on the Canaanites in the Biblical Codes and its Historical Development,” in *History and Traditions of Early Israel: Studies Presented to Eduard Nielsen* (ed. André Lemaire and Benedikt Otzen; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 159.

16. Rolf Rendtorff, “The Ger in the Priestly Laws of the Pentateuch,” in *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. Mark G. Brett; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 87.

17. Rendtorff, “The Ger,” 86–87.

18. Levenson sees these words from Ruth possibly as an echo of a liturgy of naturalization. Jon D. Levenson, “The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism,” in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, 162.

19. Certain other post-exilic texts allow for such a universalistic approach to humanity. For example, Isa 56:3, 6–7 allows for the joining together of foreigners with Yahweh and even promises their presence on the holy mountain and in the temple.

20. Craghan, *Esther*, 198. See also Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Danna Nolan Fewell, “Ruth” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (eds. Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe; Louisville: John Knox, 1992).

21. Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 321.

22. Brueggemann, *Introduction*, 321.

23. Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 69.

24. The prayers and answers are in 1:8–9; 2:12, 19–20; 3:10; 4:11–12, 14; cf. Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 70.

25. Campbell, *Ruth*, 29.

26. Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 68.

27. Phyllis Trible, *ABD* 5:842.

28. Greg A. King, “Between Text and Sermon: Ruth 2:1–13,” *Int* 52, no. 2 (April 1998): 184.

29. Craghan, *Esther*, 198.

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The Legal Status of Barren Wives in the Ancient Near East

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Biblical narratives of barren wives such as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, and the mother of Samson paint a picture of God's sovereignty and faithfulness to fulfill promises to a burgeoning nation. In these narratives, the modern reader encounters polygyny and polycoity,¹ wife rivalry, preferential treatment of certain wives and their children, and divorce, all of which are seemingly at odds with our biblical notions of marriage, divorce, and ethical treatment of others. Though scripture is mostly silent on the ramifications of barrenness, it is possible to look beyond the biblical witness to the broader ancient culture in order to understand its impact both on the women involved and society as a whole. Ancient legal, mythical, ritual, and medical records not only provide us with the broader cultural understanding of barrenness, but also, at times, mirror some of the personal and spiritual responses found in the biblical material. As a means of further understanding how this malady impacted ancient near eastern civilization, this article focuses on barrenness in legal records.

Akkadian legal material often signifies the biological status of the barren wife with the phrase, the one "who has not born children" (*ša mārī lā uldūšum*). Her title is often simply "wife" (*aššatum*).² If she is the first of multiple wives, however, she is often distinguished as "first-ranking wife" or "wife of equal status" (*hīrtum*).³ A barren wife represents a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to one of the primary functions of marriage: to produce heirs capable of assisting with the subsistence and economic stability of the family. One could even say that in some situations, "a childless marriage was not a full-fledged marriage."⁴ What avenues are left for a barren wife to secure her future? While the most obvious solution would be to adopt a child, a variety of legal parameters protecting a first-ranking wife suggest alternative options, such as taking a second wife, to provide a biological heir. However, taking a second wife is far more likely to threaten the status of a first-ranking wife than adopting an heir. Thus it is beneficial to study the marriage allowances and limitations concerning a barren wife found in the extant legal collections. This study is limited to extra-biblical legal material⁵ and marital contracts⁶ within the broader ancient Near East as a means for determining the status and rights of a barren wife.

Assessing both legal material and contractual agreements is important for establishing an accurate depiction of society. Since the various law collections at times provide only a broad picture of a particular culture's approach to justice, I view these edicts alongside contractual agreements that provide detailed specifics as to how society functioned. Studies in comparative law affirm the fluidity of interpretation and application of the law within any given society.⁷ Rather than uniformly applied as normative, the

law collections could have served as guidelines for how society should function.

It is also important to remember that all written laws may be more part of a world of "ought" than of "is." In other words, the laws project social ideals and expectations. They do not automatically tell us what people were actually doing "on the ground." Performance, i.e. compliance, always depends upon the powers of government as well as upon the will and internalized values of the population.⁸

Legal texts pertaining to polygyny and polycoity

Although existing within a society that places women under the control of fathers or husbands, a barren wife could utilize various legal precedents as a means to secure her future. One of the options available for a barren wife is to encourage her husband to take a second woman, often "as a wife." Often this second wife is signified in the textual witness through the use of "wife" (*aššatum*), "slave-wife" (*amtum*),⁹ or "junior wife/concubine" (*šugitum*).¹⁰ However, in spite of the often cited polygynous marriage accounts in the biblical ancestral narratives or practices of royalty, monogamy is the far more common practice.¹¹ No specific law explicitly states

a husband may take a second wife. However, the practice of polycoity can be inferred from the use of the term *hīrtum* ("first-ranking wife") in the laws pertaining to divorce, which will be addressed below.¹² The single legal stipulation that allows a husband to take a second wife is in the form of a caveat: in the event that his first-

ranking wife becomes sick or diseased to the extent that she is no longer able to fulfill her duties as wife, then he may take a second wife.¹³ In this instance, a husband may take a second wife, but is prohibited from divorcing his first-ranking wife. In addition, both LL §28 and LH §149 ensure provision for and protection of the first-ranking wife as long as she remains in her husband's home. Moreover, should she decide to leave her husband's home, LH §149 stipulates the return of her dowry to her upon quitting the home. At this point, the dowry would likely follow her back to the home of her father, where he would assume control until able to arrange another marriage. However, in the event that her father has already died, the dowry remains with her as her inheritance.¹⁴ Although barrenness does not seem to be the illness in mind here, the inclusion of this law does establish a precedent for the provision of a financial settlement in the case of divorce due to illness.¹⁵

Taking a second wife to combat childlessness is more apparent in the contractual agreements. Although the most common reason for a husband to take a second wife is barrenness,¹⁶ some contracts expressly forbid the husband from acquiring a second wife or a concubine regardless of the fertility of the

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wife. Obviously, a family would need to be powerful to enforce this type of stipulation. In one contract, for example, it seems that marrying into royalty is enough to pacify the desire for offspring.¹⁷ Another contract may instruct the husband to wait a period of seven years before taking another wife to ensure that his first-ranking wife is barren.¹⁸

Occasionally, a husband would marry two sisters to circumvent the possibility of barrenness. While barrenness is not the impetus for Jacob marrying Leah, the biblical account in Gen 29 has some similarities with this practice. According to some Old Babylonian agreements, this practice is likely evidenced in several contracts, where the husband pays a bride-price for both sisters.¹⁹ In some contracts, the language of “sisterhood” indicates artificial sisterhood (i.e. matrimonial adoption) in which the wife (or, in some instances, both husband and wife) purchases or adopts a “sister” as a gift to the husband.²⁰ The language used in these types of contracts specifies the unique nature of the relationship established between wives.²¹ Apparently this type of marriage agreement is beneficial to both wives, for the children born to one sister would become the offspring of both.²² An additional protection for both women, which we will revisit in the section on divorce below, is that a joint marriage typically also results in a joint divorce, which would be financially devastating for the husband.

Another option evidenced in some contracts is to “adopt” a woman as a wife to the husband and slave to the first wife, as demonstrated in CT 8 22b: “To Bunene-abi (Husband) she is a wife, to Belessunu (Wife 1) she is an *amtum*. . . .”²³ This type of marriage contract is also beneficial to the first-ranking wife, for any children born to the slave wife expressly belong to the first-ranking wife. In addition, the first-ranking wife retains authority over the slave wife, and in the event that the slave wife attempts to overreach her status, the first-ranking wife may remove her from the home.²⁴ If the slave wife has already provided children, the first-ranking wife may not sell her, but may further reduce her rank and place the “slave mark” upon her.²⁵ However, the benefits of this type of marriage also extend to the slave wife. Though her status is less than the first-ranking wife, she still enjoys a higher position in the household than that of a house slave or concubine.²⁶

It should be noted that the practice of including special provisions for a first-ranking wife may not have always been observed. A marriage document from Alalakh, near the Mediterranean and the modern border of Turkey and Syria, is structured as a “sisterhood” marriage agreement in which a woman and her niece marry the same man in order to ensure the husband is provided with an heir. However, unlike the “sisterhood” marriages of Babylon, the first-ranking wife in Alalakh does not seem to enjoy the benefits typically associated with that type of marriage arrangement. The tablet, though fragmentary, does seem to indicate that whichever wife produces a child first becomes the preferred wife.²⁷

It should be noted that Paradise asserts that, at least at Nuzi, it is not common practice for a man to have two women

in his household who simultaneously hold the rank of wife. Instead, one woman holds the rank of first-ranking wife, while the other woman or women hold a secondary rank of concubine.²⁸ Moving forward with this premise, Paradise sees a possible solution to taking a second wife indicated in some of the Nuzi contracts. This solution is specified as a “reduction in status” for one of the wives.²⁹ If Paradise’s assertions are correct, we can infer that in some situations the barren wife’s status is reduced to concubine.

Although she may retain some rights and privileges, she loses her position as primary wife and “mother” to any children born.

Legal texts pertaining to divorce and abandonment

Divorce is another option available to the husband of a barren wife, and as evidenced in many societies, a husband may divorce his wife for essentially any reason.³⁰ While the law collections may not include many explicit stipulations for polygamy, divorce is thoroughly addressed. Although a divorced barren wife would lose the protection of her husband, the law collections do establish a precedent for her financial support. Several law collections imply that the financial burden placed upon the husband is either to prevent capricious divorce or to provide financial restitution to the wife.³¹ This principle is elaborated upon in the Hammurabi collection, which seems to imply infertility as a possible cause for divorce.³² In addition to the divorce settlement, which must equal the bride-wealth originally given by the husband to his father-in-law, the wife is also given full restitution of her dowry. Driver and Miles agree that infertility is the likely cause for such a divorce, and that the high financial cost serves to offset an unjustified divorce.³³ Westbrook, however, views the monetary settlement as too steep to indicate infertility, especially in comparison to the other “illness-induced” situation outlined in LH §148 (quoted in n. 13), which only stipulates the return of the dowry. Instead, he views this as similar to the case presented in LH §156, where double restitution is made due to the future father-in-law taking the bride’s virginity.³⁴ LNB §12 is similarly structured to LH §138, but it addresses the financial support of a widow. While the case does not involve any divorce proceedings, the stipulation by the court provides insight on practices meant to protect vulnerable women.³⁵ Here, the court stipulates the return of the dowry as well as any marriage gift that her husband may have awarded her. If no such gift is awarded, the courts should assess her late husband’s estate, “and shall give to her some property in accordance with the value of her husband’s estate.”³⁶ Regarding awarding an additional monetary settlement, only the Assyrian laws provide no financial support of a wife in the event of divorce.³⁷ Excluding the Assyrian laws, regardless of whether infertility is the motivating factor behind a husband’s desire to divorce his first-ranking wife, most law collections do seem to establish a precedent that favors the position of the wife by placing a financial deterrent upon the husband. However, the barren wife has another financial weapon at her disposal: her dowry.

The dowry, often referred to in the legal and contractual material as *šeriktu*, is a gift given by the parents to the daughter as an inheritance, and it remains vested in her name throughout

her lifetime. Regardless of whether she is widowed or divorced, in most instances³⁸ it is hers to use as financial support for the remainder of her life. The dowry remains intact for her children, or in the case of the barren wife, as part of her family's estate, and returns to the children or family upon her death. According to Roth's work on several Neo-Babylonian marriage contracts, however, ten to fifteen percent of dowry contracts include some type of real estate,³⁹ so it seems a safe assumption that some childless, divorced, or widowed women could live quite comfortably from the dowry. As with the law collections, several of the contractual agreements also uphold the return of the dowry to the wife (or her family) in addition to the divorce settlement fine, usually payable by the husband.⁴⁰ In fact, Roth, Westbrook, and Paradise agree that one of the primary reasons for recording a marriage contract is the protection or delineation of the property.⁴¹ This may explain why, in the event of a divorce, most contracts preserve a clause outlining the delineation of property, fines, or both.

Returning to the "sisterhood" marriage contracts mentioned earlier, the language used to describe the unique relationship between "sisters" is especially pertinent in the event of divorce: "the marrier of one marries the other; the divorcer of one divorces the other . . ." (UET 5 87).⁴² Again, this unique relationship provides both women an additional layer of protection from capricious divorce. Should a husband decide to divorce one of them, the contract stipulates that they will both leave, presumably with their dowries as well as any children born into the marriage.⁴³ The concept that a divorced woman could be awarded custody of the children radically expands her rights within the marriage. In two contracts relating to a barren couple adopting a child, the wife is given permission to take the child in the event her husband divorces her.⁴⁴ In the slave wife marriage contracts, the result seems to be the same. Since the slave wife is purchased as a slave to the first-ranking wife, in the event of a divorce the slave wife and any children would presumably leave with the first-ranking wife. The prospect of losing both wives and the dowry, as well as any heirs, would be a strong deterrent to any husband wishing to change his marital situation. This precedent demonstrates an exceptional protection for the barren wife placed in the difficult situation of either sharing her home and rank with a second wife (even if that wife is her sister), or facing an imminent divorce due to factors beyond her control.

However, as with the practices of polygyny and polycoity, some contracts do not include any stipulations for the protection of a barren wife. In one contract from the Neo-Babylonian period, once the second wife has given birth, the first-ranking wife is awarded no financial support.⁴⁵ In this instance, the protection of a woman is primarily determined by the status of her family. Contracts that provide stipulations to protect a woman from polygyny, polycoity, or divorce are usually initiated

by the woman's family, which indicates the high position of that family within the community.⁴⁶ Therefore, it follows that families of high status are often able to offer protection in the form of a contract awarding a sizeable dowry. In one contract, for example, the wife owns an orchard which is included as part of her dowry.⁴⁷

In the absence of these factors, the woman is left with a limited number of options for determining her future, one of which includes returning to her paternal home if the dowry is not sizeable enough to allow her independent status.

In the event that a woman has no paternal home and no children to care for her, her options for financial support often include either slavery or prostitution. However, some research, primarily by Gelb and furthered by Roth, indicates the existence of a welfare system provided through either the temple or benefactors. Termed the *bīt mār banī* in a few documents dating to Neo-Babylonian period, scholars have not yet reached consensus regarding what exactly this term indicates, what this welfare system encompasses, or the persons responsible for its continuation.⁴⁸ If this program originates with the temple, Gelb's research suggests the makeup of temple personnel includes (among others) the homeless, poor, and orphans—a population which surely encompasses some childless women. However, according to Gelb, while this institution would have alleviated their living conditions, it may also have exploited them as part of the temple workforce.⁴⁹ His assessment corresponds with some of the contracts in which the *bīt mār banī* are mentioned. In one contract, a young girl is presented the options of either prostitution or entering the *bīt mār banī*. In another document, involving an adoption, the mother giving up her daughter stipulates that the adopters may not turn the child over to the *bīt mār banī*.⁵⁰ Although information regarding the *bīt mār banī* is scarce, this option is preferable to a life on the streets. Relevant to our study, the *bīt mār banī* may have provided shelter and food for divorced barren wives with no family connections or financial support.

Conclusion

In researching any group of women in ancient cultures, the tendency can be either to paint an exaggerated caricature of an overly patriarchal society, or to attempt to create an egalitarian culture from a few sparse texts. Since the biblical material provides only a few narratives on the issue of barrenness, scholars are left to fill in the gaps with inferences. Both positive and negative practices of cultures co-existing with ancient Israel facilitate such inferences by painting an accurate portrait of the status and rights of a barren wife in the ancient Near East. In spite of exceptions in every society, it is plausible to suggest that, at least within the legal structure, specific provisions and precedents were established to provide a barren wife the means with which to secure her future.

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Notes

1. Polycoity, a specific kind of polygyny, results when a husband has two or more wives of unequal social status (such as Sarai and Hagar in Gen 16). It should be noted at the outset that this article does not address the *naditum/seriktum* (temple priestesses); unlike the barren wives under discussion here, these women are childless by choice.

2. CAD vol. 1, A: Part Two, 462–65. In addition to numerous abbreviations from *The SBL Handbook of Style*, this article utilizes other abbreviations standard in studies of the ancient Near East: AT = Alalakh Tablet, BE = Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A: Cuneiform Texts, LE = Laws of Eshnunna, LH = Laws of Hammurabi, LL = Laws of Lipit-Ishtar, LNB = Neo-Babylonian Laws, LU = Laws of Ur-Nammu, MAL = Middle-Assyrian Laws, UET = Ur Excavation Texts, VAS = Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin.

3. CAD vol. 6, H, 200.

4. Karel Van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Woman* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 70.

5. Gordon R. Driver and John C. Miles, eds., *The Babylonian Laws* (2 vols; Oxford: OUP, 1952); COS; ANET; Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (SBLWAW 6; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995).

6. COS vol. 3; Rivkah Harris, “The Case of Three Babylonian Marriage Contracts,” *JNES* 33, no. 4 (1974): 363–69; Emil G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri: New Documents of the Fifth Century B.C. from the Jewish Colony at Elephantine* (New Haven: YUP, 1969); Jonathan Paradise, “Marriage Contracts of Free Persons at Nuzi,” *JCS* 39, no. 1 (1987): 1–36; Martha T. Roth, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements: 7th–3rd Centuries B.C.* (AOAT 222; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1989); Roth, “The Neo-Babylonian Widow,” *JCS* 43 (1991): 1–26; Raymond Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law* (AfOB 23; Horn, Austria: Berger & Söhne, 1988); “Marriage Customs” (AT 92) (3.101B), translation and commentary by Richard S. Hess, 251; “Seven Years of Barrenness before a Second Wife” (AT 93) (3.101C), translation and commentary by Richard S. Hess, 252; Christian Niefdorf, *Die mittelbabylonischen Rechtsurkunden aus Alalah* (AOAT 352; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 284–88.

7. J. J. Finkelstein, *The Ox that Gored* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 71, pt. 2; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981), 35; Samuel Greengus, *Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 8–9; John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 88.

8. Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 8.

9. CAD vol. 1, A: Part Two, 80–85.

10. CAD vol. 17, Š: Part Three, 200–201.

11. Marten Stol, “Private Life in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *CANE* 1:489; Samuel Greengus, “Legal and Social Institutions of Ancient Mesopotamia,” *CANE* 1:478; Harry A. Hoffner Jr., “Legal and Social Institutions of Hittite Anatolia,” *CANE* 1:566.

12. Regarding whether the second wife was actually considered a wife on equal footing with the first-ranking wife, see Paradise, “Marriage Contracts of Free Persons at Nuzi,” 8; Samuel Greengus, “Legal and Social Institutions,” *CANE* 1:478–79.

13. LL §28: “If a man’s first-ranking wife (loses her attractiveness or becomes a paralytic), she will not be evicted from the house; however, her husband may marry a healthy wife, and the second wife shall support the first-ranking wife.” Roth here acknowledges “second wife” as an alternative translation to “healthy wife.” The final phrase, which stipulates the second wife must support the first, could be rendered, “he shall support the second wife and the first-ranking wife,” a translation more closely aligned with that of S. N. Kramer. Roth, *Law Collections*, 32; COS 2:413. Kramer, “Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode,” *ANET* 160: “If a man has turned his face away from his first wife . . . (but) she has not gone out of the [house], his wife which he married

as his favorite is a second wife; he shall continue to support his first wife.” According to Kramer’s translation, initially presented in Francis R. Steele, *The Code of Lipit-Ishtar* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1948), 3–10, 20, the tablet is broken at this section, making it difficult to determine the events surrounding this change of favor. See LH §148: “If a man marries a woman, and later *la’bum*-disease seizes her and he decides to marry another woman, he may marry; he will not divorce his wife whom *la’bum*-disease seized; she shall reside in quarters he constructs and he shall continue to support her as long as she lives” (COS 2:345).

14. Westbrook emphasizes special protections for the dowry of a childless wife: “. . . under no circumstances could her husband or his family (including children from other wives) inherit [the dowry].” Westbrook, “The Character of Ancient Near Eastern Law,” in *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law* (2 vols.; ed. Raymond Westbrook; *Handbook of Oriental Studies* 72; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1:61.

15. Contrast with the loss of any divorce settlement in LH §140–41, in which the wife has publicly disparaged her husband.

16. For commentary on attitudes toward polygamy in the biblical world, see Anthony Phillips, *Essays on Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 344; Sheffield: Sheffield, 2002), 113; David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 8.

17. See, for example, HSS 9 24, in which a prince named Silwa-tesup writes, “As long as Šuwar-tepa lives, Zike shall not take a second wife. He shall not take a concubine.” Cf. Paradise, “Marriage Contracts,” 12.

18. Hess, “Seven Years of Barrenness before a Second Wife” (AT 93) (3.101C), COS 3:251–52.

19. Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, TIM 4 46, TIM 4 49, UET 5 87, UET 5 274. This practice is also evidenced in TIM 4 47.

20. “Tayatum daughter of Enki-hegal has taken Ali-abi daughter of Urmashum-hazir and Sin-duri from her father Urmashum-hazir and her mother Sin-duri as a sister. Tayatum has given Urmashum-hazir and Sin-duri her mother 5 shekels of silver as her *terhatum*. Tayatum has given her to her (T’s) husband Imgurru for marriage” (BIN 7 173). Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 116; see also Meissner, *BAP* 89, *CT* 48 57, in Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*.

21. This language typically includes the clause, “the marrier of one marries the other” (UET 5 87). Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 133.

22. See Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 106–107, on the status of children born to a lesser-ranking wife; also Driver and Miles, *Babylonian Laws*, 304–305.

23. Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 119; see also Waterman, *Business Document* 39, TIM 5 1, CT 48 48, in Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*.

24. See CT 8 22b: “The day that Shamash-nuri says to her mistress Belessunu ‘You are not my mistress,’ she will shave her and sell her.”

25. The exact nature of the “slave mark” is unknown, but for possible options see Driver and Miles, *Babylonian Laws*, 1:306–309.

26. Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 106.

27. “If Naidu (W1) has not given birth to an heir, then the daughter of her brother, Iwassura (Brother), shall be given (to Iri-halpa) (Husband). If Tatadu (W2) gives birth first for Iri-halpa, and afterwards Naidu gives birth, then the older(?) woman shall not be given anything . . .” Hess, “Marriage Customs” (AT 92) (3.101B), COS 3:251–52. C. Niefdorf has recently addressed Hess’s translation of this tablet, particularly owing to the fact that (as Hess acknowledges) the text is fragmentary. Because our research does not rise or fall on the basis of this one tablet, I retain Hess’s translation.

28. Paradise, “Marriage Contracts,” 8 n. 19; contra J. Breneman, “Nuzi Marriage Tablets” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1971), 14, 24. Paradise’s assertion is based on the lack of any mention of multiple wives with the label of *aššatum* in any Nuzi marriage or inheritance documents.

29. “If W1 gives birth, then H shall not take another wife in addition to W1 nor reduce her to concubine rank . . .” (HSS 19 85). “If W1 gives birth,

then H shall not take another wife and shall not make her a concubine” (JEN 435). Paradise, “Marriage Contracts,” 13.

30. Phillips, *Essays on Biblical Law*, 113; Greengus, “Legal and Social Institutions,” *CANE* 1:480; Grace I. Emmerson, “Women in Ancient Israel,” in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological, and Political Perspectives* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 385.

31. LU §9: “If a man divorces his first-ranking wife, he shall weigh and deliver 60 shekels of silver.” Roth, *Law Collections*, 18; see also in Roth LU 10, LNB 12. According to Hittite Law §24, a female laborer could earn a monthly wage of six shekels, so it can be assumed that the total financial settlement from an unjustified divorce could equal a laborer’s annual wage; see Hoffner, “Hittite Laws,” *COS* 2:108–109; Roth, “Legal and Social Institutions of Hittite Anatolia,” *CANE* 1:560.

32. LH §138: “If a man intends to divorce his *hīrtum* who did not bear him children, he shall give her silver as much as was her bride-wealth and restore to her the dowry that she brought from her father’s house. . . .” Roth, “Laws of Hammurabi,” *COS* 2:344.

33. Driver and Miles, *Babylonian Laws*, 1:296.

34. LH §156: “If a man selects a bride for his son and his son does not yet carnally know her, and he himself then lies with her, he shall weigh and deliver to her 30 shekels of silver; moreover, he shall restore to her whatever she brought from her father’s house, and a husband of her choice shall marry her.” Roth, “Laws of Hammurabi,” *COS* 2:345.

35. LNB §12: “A wife whose husband takes her dowry, and who has no son or daughter, and whose husband fate carries away—a dowry equivalent to the dowry (which her husband had received) shall be given to her from her husband’s estate. If her husband should award to her a marriage gift, she shall take her husband’s marriage gift together with her dowry, and thus her claim is satisfied.” Roth, “Neo-Babylonian Laws,” *COS* 2:361.

36. Roth, “Neo-Babylonian Laws,” *COS* 2:361.

37. MAL 37: “If a man intends to divorce his wife, if it is his wish, he shall give her something; if that is not his wish, he shall not give her anything, and she shall leave empty-handed.” Roth, *Law Collections*, 167.

38. Cf. LH §140–41. Driver and Miles infer that in the case of a wife publicly disparaging her husband, the language implies that she forfeits all property and gifts as a result of her misconduct. Driver and Miles, *Babylonian Laws*, 273.

39. Roth, “The Neo-Babylonian Widow,” 26 n. 109.

40. Some scholars view the inclusion of a fine placed upon the wife as “instigator” of the divorce proceedings as an indication that women

could divorce their husbands; cf. BE 6/2 40, Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 115. However, most agree that, if this was a possibility, it was uncommon. See Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 6; Greengus, “Legal and Social Institutions,” 480; Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 79–80; Roth, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements*, 14.

41. Paradise, “Marriage Contracts,” 1; Roth, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements*, 25; Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 6.

42. Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 133.

43. “If in the future, H says to W1 ‘You are not my wife,’ she shall take the hand of her sister, W2, and leave” (BIN 7 173). Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 116.

44. Cf. Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, PBS 8/2/107; VAS 18 114.

45. “. . . (if W1 does not bear children, all property of H) in city and country, as much as there may be—will belong to W2 and her children.” Roth, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements*, 42.

46. Cf. Paradise “Marriage Contracts,” 12.

47. “. . . should H desire to have another wife, W1 retains orchard which was given as part of her dowry. She may take it and leave.” Roth, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements*, 46.

48. A literal translation of *bīt mār banī* such as “house of the free person” is problematic because it fails to capture the phrase’s meaning in the literature.

49. I. J. Gelb, “The Arua Institution,” *RA* 66, no. 1 (1972): 1–32; Martha T. Roth, “Women in Transition and the *bīt mār banī*,” *RA* 82, no. 2 (1988): 133–38.

50. Roth, “Women in Transition,” 133, 136.

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Remembering Jephthah's Daughter: A Sermon

ROLLIN RAMSARAN

Everyone aspires to be Spirit-led, to be Spirit-filled, to be filled by the fruit of the Spirit. Everyone is ready to run on Spirit power! And I wish that for *you*—especially that you know the Spirit of God that has been *shaped by Jesus* and that you not change *the gospel of power* to anything less than what it should be. But this morning let me caution you about this combination of Spirit and power. For it is a combination incomplete without full knowledge; it can be potentially dangerous *without full knowledge*. It can be downright deadly!

Consider a Spirit text from the New Testament, 2 Tim 3:16: “Every scripture is inspired by God (God-breathed!) and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” This is a text familiar to many.

Now a less familiar Spirit text from the book of Judges. We find Jephthah the Gileadite, the son of a prostitute, and a mighty warrior. Jephthah the outcast returned home to Gilead, an Israelite region in Transjordan, by request of its elders, to lead the people during an impending community crisis, a crisis caused by Ammonite military aggression. For Jephthah, the outcome of the community crisis will lead directly to a familial crisis, a truly heart-wrenching family calamity. Hear then Judges 11:29–40:

Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: “If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.”

Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands. He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.

When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, “Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break.”

“My father,” she replied, “you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. But grant me this one request,” she said. “Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry.”

“You may go,” he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin.

From this comes the Israelite tradition that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite. (NIV)

In the pages of a story from long ago, we meet two people: one extolled for deliverance, one for blind obedience; one in the limelight, one in the deep foreboding shadows that escalate to a horrific death; one male, one female; one father, one *only* daughter; one named Jephthah, one left *unnamed*; one victory, one *terrible* tragedy!

These *yikes* texts, these “texts of terror” *might* (or might not!) get lightly touched upon in a Bible class, but should we dare to enter them into our *holy space of worship*? Is this proper handling of the Word of God?

Oh, but is this not a “Spirit” text? “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah.” Must we not engage such texts if we are to affirm 2 Tim 3:16 as an item of our faith? “Every Scripture is God-breathed!” And furthermore, *how dare we forget* Jephthah’s daughter when God has decreed her memory! Why is it that we have texts like the one I have read today? For those who have the mind of Christ, the Apostle Paul would answer that the particulars of this story have happened “for an example” or “in a patterned fashion” and they “were written down for our instruction.”¹ If that is true, will you consider this instructional text as well?²

Though this text is indeed instructional, it is surely uncomfortable as well. It can be ignored, forgotten, repressed. The church will rarely invite you to such a text, but today that rare invitation is being made. I invite you into this uncomfortable situation.

The fundamental question the interpreter of this narrative must ask is: need we rescue Jephthah? *Need we rescue Jephthah?* And of course, inherent in that question is, *need we rescue God?* For Jephthah had the Spirit of God! Well, let’s give it a try. Like so much of the commentary tradition and like so many others before us, let’s try to rescue Jephthah.

First, could it be that Jephthah misspoke? Jephthah didn’t mean to say *whoever* came out to meet him, but *whatever* came out to meet him. He had in mind livestock, not people. Not his family. Not his only daughter! While the Hebrew wording is ambiguous here, one still wonders why, if Jephthah himself knew what he meant (an animal), why he didn’t have confidence that God knew what he meant. Or had this been a public vow, taken before others? Did Jephthah need to save face, to avoid shame by enacting to the letter what he had said?

Hmmm? Moral of story: don't make a rash vow to God, and if you do, check your wording carefully, because God expects you to do what you say you will do, no matter what you say. (Let's put this off to the side for a moment).

Second, could it be that Jephthah didn't really sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering; he simply condemned her to a life of perpetual virginity. Here some have tried to use Jephthah's daughter (by creating a metaphorical death rather than a literal one) to help rescue Jephthah (and God). But is this not interpretive gymnastics? This woman bewailed her virginity for two months with her friends because she would never marry, never bear sons and daughters, never fulfill her social role within the people of God. This was to have been her identity; it was no small matter, and it ended with death after two months! Oh, I suppose we might follow this blind path a little further: Jephthah's daughter willingly obeyed this metaphorical death; therefore, she accepted the vow as right and honorable. She would protect Jephthah's faithfulness to God by completing the requirement of his vow.

Hmmmm? Moral of story: Creative interpretation shows that faithfulness to one's vow to God is holy above all else. Of course, the story leaves unstated why this might be so. (Let's also put this off to the side for a moment).

Finally, to cast the issue in modern psychological terms, could it be that Jephthah comes from a dysfunctional family? No doubt. The son of a prostitute and an outcast among brothers. No doubt ridiculed, humiliated, and sent away *broken*. Jephthah's status as a mighty warrior surely can be attributed, in part, to overcompensation. And certainly his return and reinstatement become for him sweet vindication. Yet, his life experiences only lead him to perpetuate more family violence, not to refrain from it.

Hmmmmmm? Moral of story: get some help! Apparently Jephthah needed something more than the Spirit of God to keep him on course.

It seems to me that there are two Jephthahs: On the one hand, there is Jephthah, a man of strength, and self-confidence, and diplomacy, and humility, and at times even overt piety. Jephthah the mighty warrior, deliverer of the Israelites against Ammonite oppression. But on the other hand, there is also Jephthah the unfaithful, one who enters into a senseless, needless, and unfaithful vow—one who carries out the sacrifice of his only child.

I propose that this second Jephthah, this unfaithful Jephthah *cannot be rescued*. For Jephthah *did not know his own traditions*. Though Jephthah had the Spirit of God at times, maybe only one time, he certainly didn't have *full knowledge* to go along with this Spirit. For Jephthah, a son of eponymous Gilead, was parented by a community that failed to impart to him a *full knowledge* of Israel's past. Yes, Jephthah could remember

conquest stories and lines drawn between small kingdoms and so forth, but he did not remember stories of God's creation of a righteous people. Jephthah cannot *remember the full knowledge of the past*, and because he cannot remember, he cannot *participate in it*, and because he cannot participate, he does not *participate in the covenant and act in righteousness!* This is why we teach the stories to our children—Sunday school, and VBS, and home reading. This is why we study scripture together at all levels of Christian education and why we are committed to biblical preaching. Will we commit to learning our traditions? We cannot afford to go out into the world without a firm grasp on our heritage as the ongoing people of God. We need to be guided by a firm grasp of the covenantal traditions and righteousness—right doing, doing right.

A young woman died! And 42,000 covenantal Ephraimites will die before Jephthah is through.

You've now heard my evaluation of Jephthah. But how would an Israelite evaluate him? I have in mind here a thinking Israelite who knew his or her traditions and wanted to learn from Jephthah's story. I dare say Jephthah would not fare well in such an evaluation either. Three reasons:

First, Jephthah failed at parenthood. And not only in the obvious way—sacrificing his daughter. Long before that act, he failed to impart to his daughter the character of their God and their God's covenant. He failed her as his family had failed him. Jephthah's daughter completed the vow out of loyalty—not out of wisdom, not out of *knowing* faithfulness, and certainly not out of covenantal faithfulness! She acted upon what she knew, but sadly she had learned from her father, who knew little.

Second, Jephthah followed the letter and not the spirit of the law. Israelite law codes indicate flexible interpretation and application of laws, always with an eye to concern for the oppressed. Who is Jephthah's daughter if she is not oppressed in this situation? Treated as guilty by her father! Though she had done no wrong! Human sacrifice is hideous in Israel's traditions. What does the Torah—letter or spirit—have to do with a senseless vow misdirected to a family member! Does

anyone remember the story of Abraham and Isaac, and what it says about the character and will of God? Whatever happened to "Thou shall not kill"! Praise God that someone mourns, someone remembers. And who is it who remembers, who is it who renews the covenantal traditions in our text? Is it not the women of the people of God, the

daughters of Israel!

Third, and finally, Jephthah has lost sight of the cultic system established by Moses. Has someone unwittingly sinned? Has someone unwittingly misspoken? Let him or her make sacrifice and confession before the LORD. You see, a prideful Jephthah could not place himself humbly in the hands of the one supreme God. For Jephthah, Yahweh was only one

Jephthah's daughter could only have wished for what you have right now—a new reality in Christ Jesus that welcomes all into full participation without distinction.

God among many. O brother Jephthah! Do you not remember the foundation of the covenant, the first commandment? One never owns the Spirit of God; the Spirit comes and goes at will. But one is responsible for one's humanness for the extent of their life. We should be prepared!

Does this story of Jephthah and his daughter speak to Christians leaders like ourselves? Those of us who are recipients of the comings and goings of the Spirit for ministry? Certainly there is more here than avoiding rash and ill-worded vows. Certainly there is more here than trying to rescue Jephthah, or God, or God's Spirit from wrongdoing. If we are to learn from Jephthah, we must learn not to follow him in the way of unfaithfulness. Disciples of Jesus respect the Spirit of God, and they do not neglect the knowledge of their traditions. Nor do they forget to cultivate their ability for proper reasoning and application of the things of God. Leaders do not protect their pride and place of status by entering into evil acts rather than humbly asking pardon before God. In interpreting the purposes of God, we should be found standing on the side of what is right—taking our place beside God as those who stand for the oppressed and the excluded. *Jephthah's daughter could only have wished for what you have right now—a new reality in Christ Jesus that welcomes all into full participation without distinction.* In such a reality she would have lived and flourished. Friends, is it not time to renew our commitment to our traditions again? Even to the most difficult ones? And is it not now, in our time, for all the daughters to be liberated? I hope you want to be stretched; I hope you want to know and wrestle with the fullness of your God-given traditions.

But don't mourn for Jephthah's daughter, remember her! Are we not Christians? Do we not see through the eyes of faith? Maybe there is an analogical meaning to this text, maybe there is yet some hope lingering. Although the historian and the community have forgotten her name, although we have too often forgotten her text, the powerful God, the God who crafts from nothing, has chosen to preserve her story. Consider a question:

Does the Spirit of God still speak to the churches? Is there still a good word to be uttered for testing among the saints? If so, then hear and test these words: The day is coming when each of us will sit before Jephthah's daughter *and we will be taught by her!* And she will tell us the story of our God who brings to life those things that are not, who redeems the victim and the powerless, and the outcast. And this daughter of Jephthah will be named again, and she will teach us about all that we were given, which is all that she had longed for—peace and wholeness, love and participation in the reign of Yahweh.

Go then from this place, struggle if you must over this text; but above all walk in a manner that will bring you no shame when you meet Jephthah's daughter in the coming Day of our LORD.

Notes

1. Compare 1 Cor 10:11, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come" (NIV).
2. When first preached, the author here included a personal illustration about entering into an uncomfortable situation. Discomfort led to hesitation and fear, as is often the case when approaching an uncomfortable biblical text. Someone adapting this sermon for their own use might choose to insert a similar personal illustration here.

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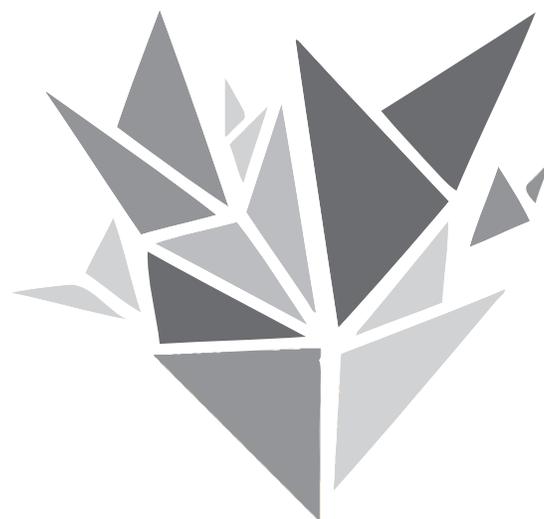
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Book Review

Sex, Wives, and Warriors: Reading Biblical Narrative with Its Ancient Audience

By Philip F. Esler (*Cascade*, 2011)

REVIEWED BY JEFF MILLER

Esler is Emeritus Professor of Biblical Interpretation at St Mary's University College, Twickenham, London, and was principal of St. Mary's when this book was published. His several books have tended to apply social-scientific approaches to NT studies. The present volume does the same for a handful of OT narrative texts.

A seventy-six page introduction provides two admirable summaries. The first summary traces the history of academic treatment of biblical narrative. Esler promptly distances himself from "other approaches currently in vogue in the scholarly marketplace that are not concerned with reading for original meaning...." In contrast, he offers "a particular answer to the question of how we should read these narratives—in particular by seeking to understand the meanings they would have conveyed to their original audiences in ancient Israel" (3). This section's overview of scholarship will strike many readers as tedious; the non-specialist could skip this section and move more quickly to the "sex, wives, and warriors" promised in the title.

The introduction's second summary treats the historical and, especially, the social contexts of OT narrative. Here Esler hits his stride as he lays a foreshadowing foundation for his use of sociology in interpreting narratives. He singles out the following categories for special mention: families and villages; group (as opposed to individualistic) orientation; honor and shame; challenge and response; limited good; patrons and clients; patrilineality, patrilocality, and polygyny; agrarian socioeconomic structure; and high-context cultures. Knowledge of some of these categories (e.g., honor and shame, patrons and clients) is commonplace among scholars of either testament. In contrast, other categories are infrequently encountered outside sociological circles and therefore give the reader high hopes for finding new insights in Esler's interpretations.

Chapters 3–10 are interpretations of eight OT narratives. Two chapters fall under the title's category, "wives." Though six of eight narratives Esler treats are from the book of Samuel, the first is from Gen 38, "Judah and Tamar." One example of the sociological approach is notice given to the text's comment that Judah named Er (Gen 38:3) while Judah's wife named Onan and Shelah (38:4–5). The sociological category spurring this attentiveness is the above-mentioned high-context culture: "to understand what happens in the narrative, we have to read the brief account of these births quite closely, paying careful attention to every detail in this

text from a high-context culture where compression and understatement were the rule" (87). The text is indicating that Judah was "mainly focused on his firstborn" and had a "direct and interested role ... in that first birth" (88), a "predominant concern for his firstborn" (90).

The next investigation of wives concerns Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam 1–2). Here sociology again serves Esler well as he describes relationships between co-wives, sometimes called rival-wives, noting especially the potential strife caused when a second wife is procured to mollify the shame brought when the first wife has not borne children. Esler moves from this feature of polygynous marriages to the sociological category of challenge and response. When, for example, Peninnah provokes Hannah regarding their husband's gifts of sacrificial meat at Shiloh, she seeks to gain honor by issuing a public challenge (1 Sam 1:6–7). Esler explains, "For Peninnah this was a glorious opportunity to take [public] revenge for the fact that at home Hannah, in spite of her having no children, was the wife whom Elkanah loved and probably the wife with authority" (127).

Four narratives fall under the title's category, "warriors," beginning with "The Madness of Saul, a Warrior-King (1 Sam 8–31)," then moving to David. David as warrior is the topic of two chapters: "David and Goliath (1 Sam 17:1–18:5)" and "David, Banditry and Kingship (1 Sam 19:1–2 Sam 5:5)." Esler has much to offer here, having published elsewhere on Mediterranean single combat. The reader dives deeply, for example, into the sociology of challenge and response, already introduced regarding the interactions of Hannah and Peninnah, and also into the sociology of sibling rivalry. Esler's approach, however, is not exclusively sociological. An example of a literary insight is the connection drawn between Hannah's song and David's rise: "David is similar to one of the poor and needy whom Hannah had sung would be lifted up to sit with princes (1 Sam 2:8)" (200). Consider also a theological note: "The core of the message is that God will not be restrained by established social roles and institutions in effecting his purposes, especially to the extent that he means to raise the lowly..." (214).

Chapter 8 is "By the Hand of a Woman: Judith the Female Warrior" and is the book's sole excursion into the Apocrypha. A significant part of this chapter is a comparison of the narratives of Judith and David. Esler sees considerably more points of contact between these two warriors than he does, for example, between the oft-compared Judith and Jael. Of Judith,

Esler says, “Her story is really David’s played in a different key” (287). The most salient similarity shared by these two heroes is that each “is an utterly improbable savior of Israel...” (186–87).

Two of Esler’s interpretations fall under the book title’s category, “sex.” The book title begins, “Sex, Wives, and Warriors,” but the table of contents reorders this triad as wives, warriors, sex. Furthermore, the book is much more about warriors than wives and sex. Indeed, even these two chapters are more about warriors than sex. One cannot help but wonder, therefore, whether Esler’s original title was the present subtitle (*Reading Biblical Narrative with Its Ancient Audience*), and adding *Sex* as the title’s opening word was the publisher’s preference. In any case, the two main contributions of the chapter on “David, Bathsheba and the Ammonite War” are that Esler approaches 2 Sam 10–12 with an understanding of patrons and clients and with an appreciation for how the sometimes-overlooked Ammonite war—especially David’s surprisingly delayed reaction to the Ammonite insult—knits the several pericopes together. Concerning the former, “The details of the account [of Nathan’s parabolic accusation] make good sense within the framework of God as patron, Nathan his prophet as broker and David as client” (316). In this context, Esler again adds theological comment to his largely literary and sociological approach: “This element in the narrative discloses something fundamentally important about this divine patron—he has an abiding concern for justice” (317). In this, the shortest chapter, one small weakness of Esler’s book can be illustrated: Because he regularly gives careful attention to the fine details of the biblical text, it is all the more apparent when Esler himself is dismissive of some portion of text. Consider, for example, his surprisingly abrupt comment on 2 Sam 12:25: “Then comes the curious episode in the story when God sends Nathan to give Solomon another name, Jedidiah,

meaning ‘Beloved of the Lord,’ even though this name is not used of Solomon thereafter” (319).

The final chapter is titled, “Dishonor Avenged: Amnon, Tamar and Absalom (2 Sam 13).” One of its contributions is a sociologically enhanced understanding of the sibling bond, including the strong bond of full siblings in contrast to children of co-wives in a polygynous system. While the obvious sibling relationships involved are among Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom, Esler also scrutinizes the role of Jonadab; though he is David’s nephew, he orchestrates Amnon’s opportunity to rape Tamar. Thus the breaches of family honor and group orientation are far reaching, shaming not only David’s immediate royal family, but also his family of origin. Another contribution of this chapter is its emphasis on the outrage committed against Tamar. Western readers will likely not overlook the physical and psychological pain resulting from Amnon’s crime, but these same readers would likely underestimate Tamar’s ensuing social and even familial ostracization. Simply stated, “to rape a woman is to deny her the prospect of a happy and honorable life.... A man who rapes a woman in this context will, in most cases, consign his victim to a form of social death” (344).

Esler’s work is indeed full of rewards for the scholar interested in OT narratives. His attention to original meaning will appeal to many, though his emphasis on meaning inferred by the original audience rather than meaning intended by the author will be met with mixed opinions. The book is heavy on narratives involving OT women, and will therefore be a useful resource for egalitarian scholars, especially those interested in literary and sociological interpretive methods.

Jeff Miller is editor of *Priscilla Papers*.



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A Psalm

By Elizabeth Gentry

In you I find peace my LORD
In you I find strength my God
I find contentment resting in Yahweh's arms

Desires of the flesh consume me
They block out the light from Yahweh's face
Until I find myself lost in an all too familiar place
I've heard this Siren song before, calling me,
Calling me further into the darkness
Where the face of my Savior is shrouded

The darkness envelops my heart
The Siren's song pierces me with its dart
And I fall,
Fall in love with that which kills.

Then the Siren chills my bones.
Its tone is a chain around my soul
And I scream,
Scream for Yahweh to break my chains

Suddenly the blood red light of my Savior breaks through
The siren shivers at the voice of my God
The darkness trembles at the cry of my LORD
Sin is no match for the power of Yahweh
My chains melt away in the hands of my God

He pulls me out of the deathly abyss
Into his arms he pulls me near
He whispers a love song into my ear
Singing of his delight in me

Praise the LORD O my soul
All my inmost being, praise his holy name
May I never forget what Yahweh has done
Never ignore that still small voice saying,
No, don't go,
Don't follow the sound of the Siren.

In you I find peace my LORD
In you I find strength my God
I find contentment resting in Yahweh's arms.



ELIZABETH GENTRY is a 2014 graduate of Milligan College with a BA in Bible. She currently lives in Chicago where she is on staff at Community Christian Church Edgewater as a year long resident. Although she doesn't consider herself a poet, she writes frequently on her blog about life and ministry. She can be reached at ekgentry14.blogspot.com.



Burning Bush

By Shannon Schaefer

Rooted
in my kitchen chair,
your eyes blue flashing
fire,
leaping from soul, flare
where burn flames hottest.

You tell your wild stories
exclaiming joy,
throwing spring branches wide
to show me how big—
and then you throw farther.

I turn aside.

Here we sit,
Parched edges of my wilderness,
Horeb
And hot cereal
All mingled together.
Mystery morning,
glory ground,
invitation:
my God in a boy.

“Moses, Moses...”

Here I am.



SHANNON BRITTON SCHAEFER is a MDiv student at Duke Divinity School and holds a BA in Humanities from Milligan College. Her interests lie at the intersections of embodied Christian spirituality, theology and literature, and the worship life of the church. She contributes regularly to BLogos, the blog of the Ekklesia Project and spends her days hanging out with her ten year old son. She can be reached at srschae@gmail.com.

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- Believers have equal authority and equal responsibility to exercise their gifts without regard to gender, ethnicity, or class and without the limits of culturally defined roles.
- Restricting believers from exercising their gifts—on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, or class—resists the work of the Spirit of God and is unjust.
- Believers must promote righteousness and oppose injustice in all its forms.

Opposing Injustice

CBE recognizes that injustice is an abuse of power, taking from others what God has given them: their dignity, their freedom, their resources, and even their very lives. CBE also recognizes that prohibiting individuals from exercising their God-given gifts to further his kingdom constitutes injustice in a form that impoverishes the body of Christ and its ministry in the world at large. CBE accepts the call to be part of God's mission in opposing injustice as required in Scriptures such as Micah 6:8.

Envisioned Future

Christians for Biblical Equality envisions a future where all believers are freed to exercise their gifts for God's glory and purposes, with the full support of their Christian communities.

Statement of Faith

- *We believe* the Bible is the inspired Word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- *We believe* in the unity and trinity of God, eternally existing as three equal persons.
- *We believe* in the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- *We believe* in the sinfulness of all persons. One result of sin is shattered relationships with God, others, and self.
- *We believe* that eternal salvation and restored relationships are possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- *We believe* in the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, and in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.
- *We believe* in the equality and essential dignity of men and women of all ethnicities, ages, and classes. We recognize that all persons are made in the image of God and are to reflect that image in the community of believers, in the home, and in society.
- *We believe* that men and women are to diligently develop and use their God-given gifts for the good of the home, church, and society.
- *We believe* in the family, celibate singleness, and faithful heterosexual marriage as God's design.
- *We believe* that, as mandated by the Bible, men and women are to oppose injustice.

CBE Membership

CBE membership is available to those who support CBE's Statement of Faith. Members receive CBE's quarterly publications, *Mutuality* magazine and *Priscilla Papers* journal, as well as discounts to our bookstore and conferences. Visit cbe.today/members for details.



CBE Membership Application

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| Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$52 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$135 |
| Household | <input type="checkbox"/> \$72 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$190 |
| Low Income* | <input type="checkbox"/> \$28 | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
| Non-Member Subscription** | <input type="checkbox"/> \$45 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$120 |
| <i>Priscilla Papers</i> Subscription*** | <input type="checkbox"/> \$30 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 |

| International Members | 1 Year | 3 Years |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$59 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$154 |
| Household | <input type="checkbox"/> \$79 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$204 |
| Low Income* | <input type="checkbox"/> \$37 | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A |
| Non-Member Subscription** | <input type="checkbox"/> \$55 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$145 |
| <i>Priscilla Papers</i> Subscription*** | <input type="checkbox"/> \$40 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 |

| Organizations | 1 Year |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1–100 people | <input type="checkbox"/> \$60 |
| 101–500 people | <input type="checkbox"/> \$95 |
| 501–1,000 people | <input type="checkbox"/> \$150 |
| 1,001–2,000 people | <input type="checkbox"/> \$235 |
| 2,001–5,000 people | <input type="checkbox"/> \$325 |
| 5,001+ people | <input type="checkbox"/> \$420 |

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TOTAL \$ _____

* Available to those with an annual household income of less than \$25,000.

** Does not include membership benefits.

*** Includes *Priscilla Papers* only. Does not include membership benefits.

CBE is an exempt organization as described in IRC Sec. 501(c)3 and as such donations qualify as charitable contributions where allowed by law.

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Christians for Biblical Equality

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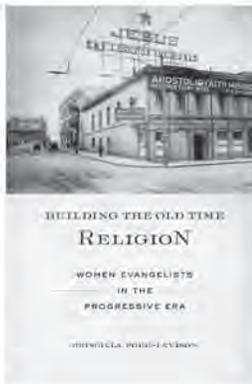
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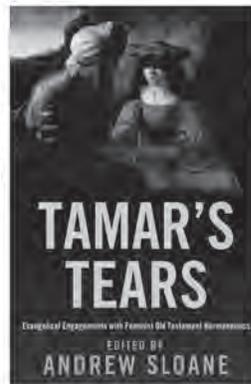
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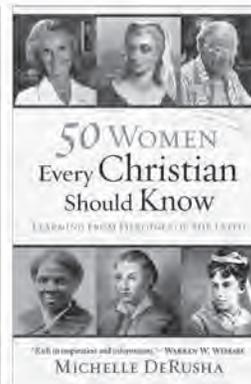
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